The UNESCO COURIER

INTERVIEW WITH
MICHEL SERRES

DECEMBER 1993

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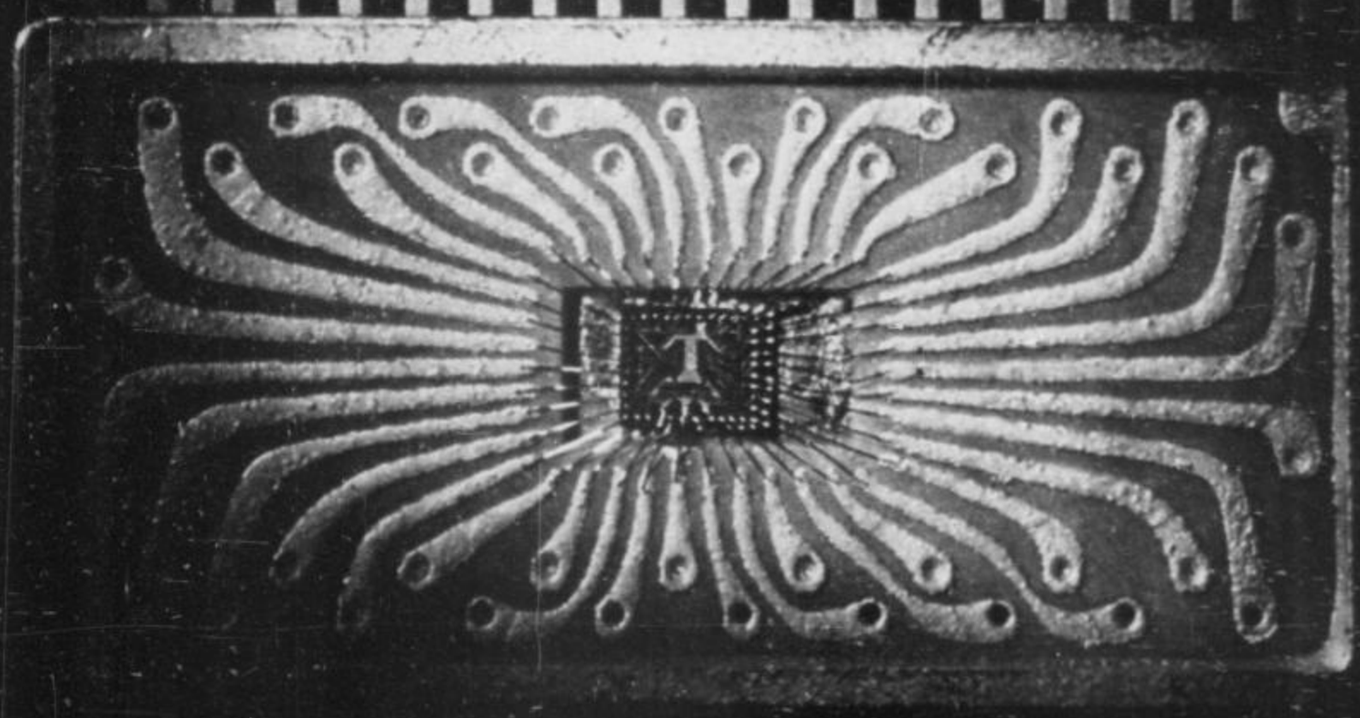
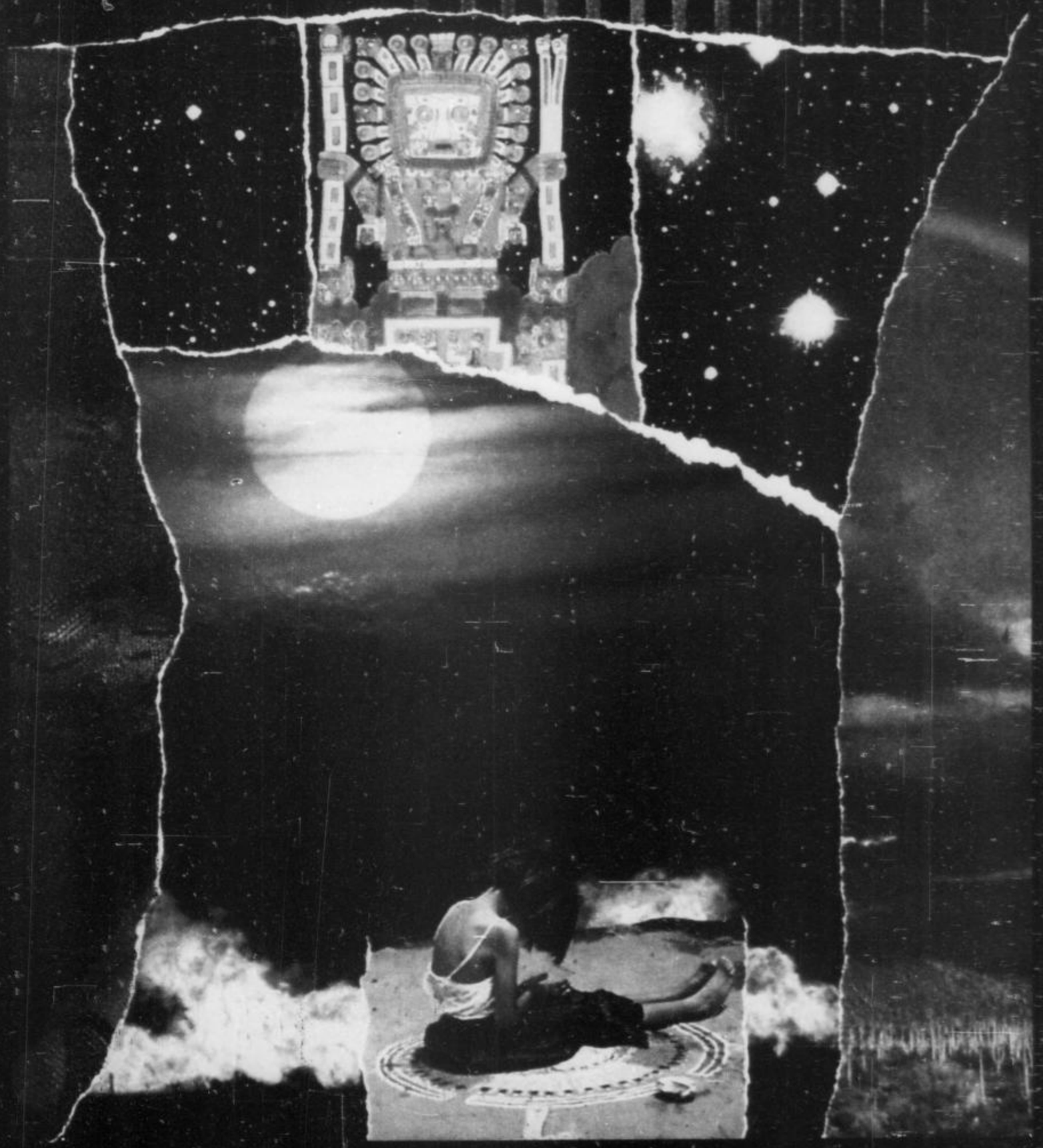
A NORTH-SOUTH DEBATE
THE MEANING OF PROGRESS





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Federico Mayor and the Abbé Pierre call for a pact to combat poverty

To mark the "International Day for the Eradication of Poverty", which was celebrated for the first time at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters on 17 October 1993, Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, and the Abbé Pierre, France's best-known defender of the needy and homeless, launched a joint appeal. The unabridged text of the appeal, which was read out by the Abbé Pierre, is published below.

THE number of deprived people is spiralling upwards in all nations. How much poverty and misery can freedom and democracy bear without seriously endangering world peace?

Destitution is a form of violence that knows no frontiers.

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of the most deprived is above all an urgent appeal for sharing and for intellectual, moral and material solidarity.

The anger that each of us feels when faced with victims of hunger, illness, ignorance and violence is fully justified. It is a duty to refuse, with all our being, the unacceptable.

Poverty, in all its forms, imperils not only the poor, but also that which is human in those who are better off.

That is why everyone, everywhere, should ruthlessly wage war on it.

Whether it be in the inner cities of the industrialized countries or in the rural areas of the least—or most—advanced nations, whatever the priorities of states may be today, poverty requires a general mobilization, not against others, but to save what is human in each of us.

The solemn appeal we are launching today comes from the heart as well as from the mind. It is addressed to all of you here as well as to all the world's political, economic, social and cultural decision-makers, and especially to the young, who have always felt an instinctive revulsion against poverty.

We urge every organization at every level of society—from families to sports clubs, professional associations and community groups—to make a firm, steadfast commitment.

A "civil pact" to fight against poverty and for human dignity must be concluded and put into effect now.

No idea must be neglected, no amount of goodwill considered superfluous. Anger, determination, imagination and audacity are needed to put an end to this tragedy.

If the "civil pact" is thus strengthened, it will triumph. ■

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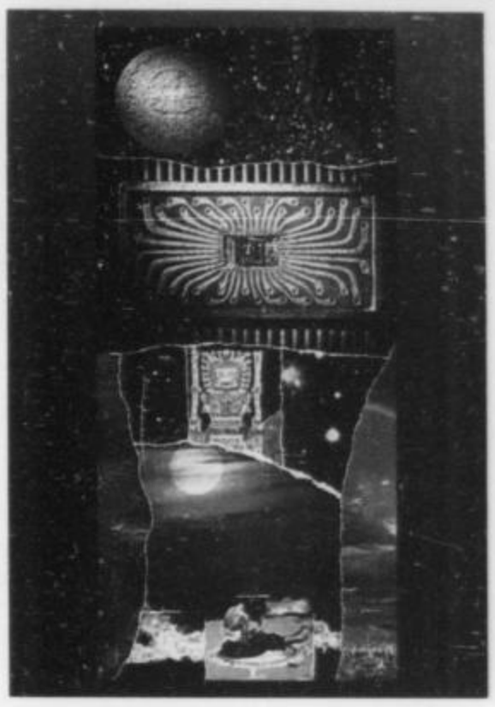

Cover:
Solaris universalis (1993), a collage by the Quebec artist Alain Corrigou.

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"The Governments of the States parties to this Constitution on behalf of their peoples declare,
"that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed . . .
"that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.
"For these reasons, the States parties . . . are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives. . . ."
EXTRACT FROM THE PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF UNESCO. LONDON, 16 NOVEMBER 1945

MICHEL SERRES

talks to François-Bernard Huyghe

Michel Serres of the Académie Française is an educator and philosopher whose interests range from science and literature to painting and environmental issues and whose self-proclaimed purpose is to establish "the link between the sciences, law and religion". He believes strongly that the philosopher should play a part in the life of the community and is a member of UNESCO's Ad hoc Forum of Reflection, which is seeking to strengthen worldwide intellectual co-operation in identifying and responding to the new challenges facing humanity. He is the author of some twenty books including *Le Contrat naturel* (1990) and *Le Tiers-Instruit* (1991). His most recent works are *Eclaircissements* (Editions François Bourin, Paris, 1992), a book of conversations with Bruno Latour, and *La Légende des Anges* (Flammarion, Paris, 1993).

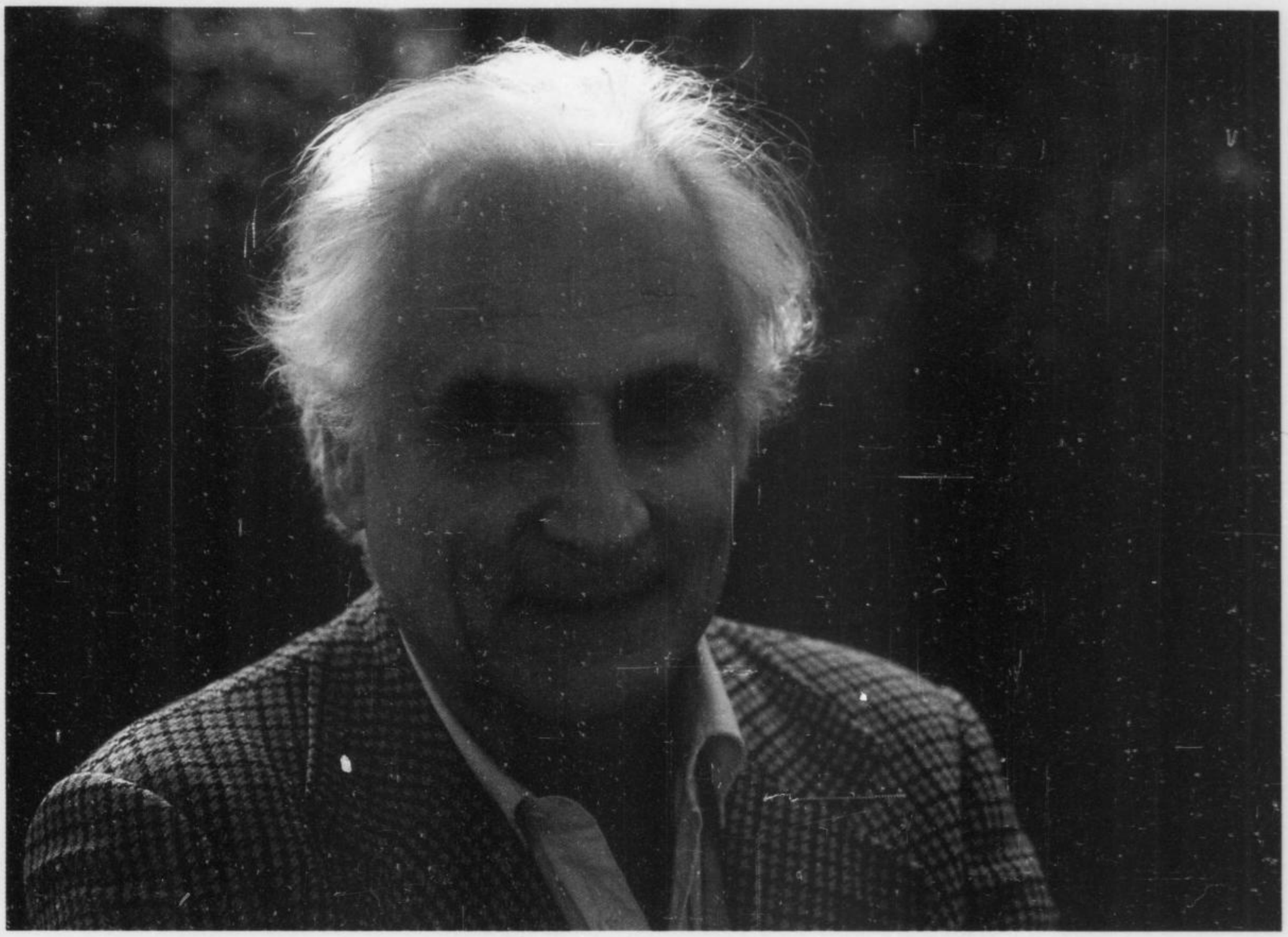
■ *One of your books is entitled* Le contrat naturel *(The Natural Contract). Does this mean man can make a contract with Mother Nature?*

—Mother Nature does not appear in my book. What I describe is a new shift, from earth with a small "e", denoting earth as one of the elements or the earth of farming, to Earth with a capital "E", meaning the planet, and hence a shift from a local perception to a global conception. We have been witnessing the emergence of such a global conception, from the technological, human and scientific points of view, for the past twenty years, which is why I examine both meanings of the word "earth" and hardly ever use the word "Nature".

This idea of a new globality is perhaps best symbolized by a photograph taken from space, which arouses a feeling that just about everyone who has seen it must have shared. It shows the whole planet as seen by a human eye. This new perception is an event in the history of mankind. Owing to this globalization of the way the Earth as an object—the planet—is perceived, and by a kind of recoil effect, the unity of humanity is being gradually constructed. Societies can only come into being if they have an object in common; this object, the globalized Earth, is new, and new bonds are thus being established between humanity and the planet.

The "natural contract" (which has echoes of Rousseau's "social contract") applies to this emerging bond. The idea of standing in a legal relationship with the entire planet was foreign to previous generations, but just as human societies cannot be conceived of without the social contract, the construction of the globality and unity of the human race cannot be conceived of without the idea of a natural contract. The Enlightenment philosophers had

FRANÇOIS-BERNARD HUYGHE
is a French writer and journalist.



already worked out a concept of the human Universal and natural law, but no-one before our times could have imagined this construction of the global. The natural contract is thus not a metaphor to describe our relationship with the Earth, but a full-blown philosophical concept.

■ ***Does it not relate back to to the discovery of laws—the laws governing our survival, for example?***

—No law, in the legal world itself or in the philosophy of law, comes into being unless it is preceded by a contract. Contracts are a prerequisite for all laws. But the same word is used to denote laws in the physical sciences and the laws we humans enact, and until now these two sets did not intersect. The natural contract establishes a relationship between the exact and the human sciences, between the two kinds of laws.

Do you know of a single philosopher worthy of the name who has not at some time been forced to think anew about science and the law, and about the relationship between the two kinds of laws that govern them? The whole problem of Western philosophy resides in this relationship or linkage.

The philosopher's job is to describe the conditions that have to be met in order for laws to be made, not to describe the content of those laws. It is to think about the nature of the bonds on which duties are grounded. In the case of the social contract, the bonds are between human beings only, while physical laws relate exclusively to links between objects. What is the relationship between these two kinds of bond?

A link must be forged between humanity, now in the process of becoming one, and this new object, planet Earth. This relationship, which entails new duties, is what I call the natural contract. We can discuss the duties when cases come to court. We have already seen lawsuits involving the users of a national park and the park itself—which thus becomes a legal entity possessing rights. As cases like these are tried, and judicial precedents are set, the duties involved will gradually be established. The law did not cover these areas. It therefore has to be thought through, first in philosophical terms, then in legal and, lastly, political terms.

■ ***Should the Earth be viewed as a "subject", an entity possessing rights?***

—That is the main problem facing the philosopher. How can an object become a

What steps can be taken against the development of a universal culture that only expresses a single force?

subject? All advances in law have consisted of taking things that had been objects and turning them into subjects. Slaves, who were objects, became subjects before the law, and the same is happening with children and embryos. Every time law makes progress, it turns objects into subjects in this way. The planet was an object and I am suggesting it be made a subject. This innovation has met with a certain amount of resistance, but in philosophy one must learn to challenge generally accepted ideas and be ready to accept that an issue has taken on a new form.

■ ***Have atomic weapons helped the idea of globality to emerge?***

—The shift from the local to the global did indeed begin some time ago. The atomic bomb has been what I have called a "world object", in other words a technological object one of whose dimensions is world-wide in scale. It was one step on the road from the local to the global. Today we have the means to assess this relationship between the local and the global and express it in equations. Climatological models are another example.

■ ***Cross-fertilization is another of your concepts.***

—Education today produces scientists who, generally speaking, are ignorant outside their own fields, and cultured people who know nothing about science. Most of today's problems stem from the separation between these two groups. Both have become decision-makers but they no longer understand each other. The latter enact human laws without bearing in mind the existence of objects and of science, while the former discover and apply natural laws without taking human beings into account. This is where I first used the idea of cross-fertilization—imagine, as Plato did, a sociologist familiar with natural science or a politician well versed in physics. The idea of cross-fertilization means first of all devising an education system that does not separate the exact sciences and the humanities in a foolish, dangerous way.

It then occurred to me that cross-fertilization was the global concept underlying all learning processes. If you start to learn physics, your life and your world are going to change. You become crossbred by the very fact of learning. That's why I started my book on education (*Le Tiers-Instruit*) with a portrait, describing how I learned to write with my right hand even though I was left-handed. Left- or right-handed people will always be physically and intellectually hemiplegic—half their body is paralysed. If you know how to use both hands your body is whole. The crossbreed I'm talking about is this monster—a human being—who can use his or her right and left hands at the same time, reborn at the point where the two sides meet.

We experience this a little when we learn to speak another language. It is as if a second person were entering us to beget a third, by cross-fertilization. The hybrid offspring is what I call the *tiers-instruit*, the "educated third party".

■ ***Traditionally, culture is viewed as something that makes an individual "blossom". Is there a relationship between your own idea of culture and this long-established metaphor?***

—I'm not really fond of the word "culture" which, like "nature", is one of those words that always cause aguments. But to continue with the metaphor let's say that cross-breeding is similar to a graft. When something is learned, a third person is produced from the rootstock into which the scion is inserted.

■ ***Are you advocating a form of learning that would go on making us forever someone else, helping us each to become, in our own way, the "educated third person" that we unknowingly carry around inside us?***

—We must accept and acknowledge this "someone else", who keeps company with us and takes us to meet a second person. The moment you acknowledge otherness, learning has this modifying effect. It is not a matter of developing a philosophy of the Other. The Other is the second person. We are talking about the educated third person begotten by the encounter between the self and the other.

There are thousands of books on

teaching that have never served any purpose other than to enable inspectors to terrorize teachers. No amount of teacher training can provide you with specific details about the individual pupils in such-and-such a class at such-and-such a time of day, and so the more specific the textbook, the more illusory it is.

As far as teaching is concerned, giving practical instructions—advising teachers to get their pupils to read the newspapers, for instance—often amounts to giving abstract instructions. The reality consists of particular cases and particular types of pupil. Generally speaking, educational theory is middle-of-the-road, neither specific nor abstract. It is much less useful than it claims to be or is thought to be. The issue I am interested in is, what are the necessary conditions for learning?

■ ***You are a member of a UNESCO Forum which is concerned with getting to grips with specifics and recommending solutions.***

—In *Le contrat naturel* I take note of something that happened, perhaps, after the founding of UNESCO: the construction of a human unity that, for many reasons, objective reasons in particular, could probably not have been foreseen in the late 1940s. The specific advice I give the Forum will take this rise of the global into account.

We are currently witnessing an irresistibly growing trend towards the global. Unfortunately this trend is increasingly monopolized by the most powerful, whose might is right. That which is universal is warped when it is taken over by a single power, and we are increasingly under the sway of a single culture.

What specific steps can be taken against the development of a universal culture that only expresses a single force? That is the question.

■ ***The media have a tendency to look upon philosophers as oracles, asking them for their ideas about how to save the world and their views on all kinds of current events. What do you feel about this?***

—It's true that the media ask philosophers all sorts of questions on a host of topics. Personally, I never answer such questions because I don't think my ideas on all kinds of topics are necessarily useful. I only answer questions about topics dealt with in my books or about things like the Forum you mentioned. In all other cases I keep out of the media because my mind is not all-embracing. Furthermore, I never engage in polemics. Polemics is the enemy of every form of invention. Those who do not invent have no right to be considered as intellectuals or philosophers. Polemics is an unmitigated obstacle to the invention of concepts.

Philosophers are not "competent" in the sense of being experts, but they have a very specific task, which is to produce ideas. I would rather produce in my field and refuse to answer questions outside it. I'd never write a book attacking another book. On the contrary, if I see someone come up with a new concept I'm as happy about it as if I had thought it up myself. A new concept is something very rare and very fragile. It must be protected like a newborn child. It will bear fruit later, perhaps in fifty years. ■

EDITORIAL

WITH the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the ideological polarization in which intellectual life had been mired during much of this century came to an end. Ideologies are dead; they have been replaced by a globalism that brings with it new hopes but also new dangers. More diffuse polarities are emerging and spreading along ethnic, religious, racial and regional fault lines. Above all there is the great divide that tragically isolates the privileged inhabitants of the prosperous, powerful North from the rejected masses of the South.

Intellectuals of every standpoint are well placed to join forces and reflect upon these promises and dangers—as long as they can find a minimum of common ground from which to expose the delusions of nationalism on the one hand and the snares of totalitarianism on the other. In short, as long as they speak a common language.

Earlier this year forty writers and artists from all over the world gathered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to discuss these issues. The meeting was organized on the initiative of the French journalist Jean Daniel, the French political theorist Régis Debray, *UNESCO Courier* Director Bahgat Elnadi and Editor-in-Chief Adel Rifaat. It was sponsored by *La Repubblica* (Italy), *O Estado de São Paulo* (Brazil), *The Los Angeles Times* (United States), *Le Nouvel Observateur* (France), *El Pais* (Spain) and the *UNESCO Courier*. The event was envisaged as the first of a series of "Meetings of Intellectuals and Creators for a Single World" which will take place annually to discuss a given topic free from all political and commercial pressures. This year's theme was, "Can North and South share the same idea of progress?".

On the following pages we publish excerpts from some of the oral and written contributions to the meeting, which gave rise to a fruitful exchange of ideas—not least on a fundamental question of terminology, the meaning and implications of the ambivalent concept of progress.

Progress can be seen as a myth of industrial modernity, an emanation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition which has since the Enlightenment been treated almost as though it were a secular version of the concept of Providence. During the nineteenth century it spread in the wake of Western expansion. In all cultures and in all parts of the world, progress could be clearly measured in the fields of science and technology but had little or no meaning in art, religion and politics. Those who believed it would bring about international peace, social harmony, the end of religious superstitions and ethnic conflict, not to mention the standardization of cultures, have continually seen their predictions come to nothing.

For forty years the myth of progress has survived in its modern version, development, and has contributed to the establishment, under the rule of market forces, of a world economic system encompassing part of the peoples of the South, but excluding the vast majority. It has also had destructive and possibly irreversible effects on the environment.

Perhaps the very perception of a North-South dichotomy is itself an offshoot of the myth of modernity. The geographical and chronological divisions between North and South have become blurred now that poverty and destitution have become part of the urban landscape north of the equator, and in all countries, rich and poor, new classes are living like their counterparts in London, Paris and New York.

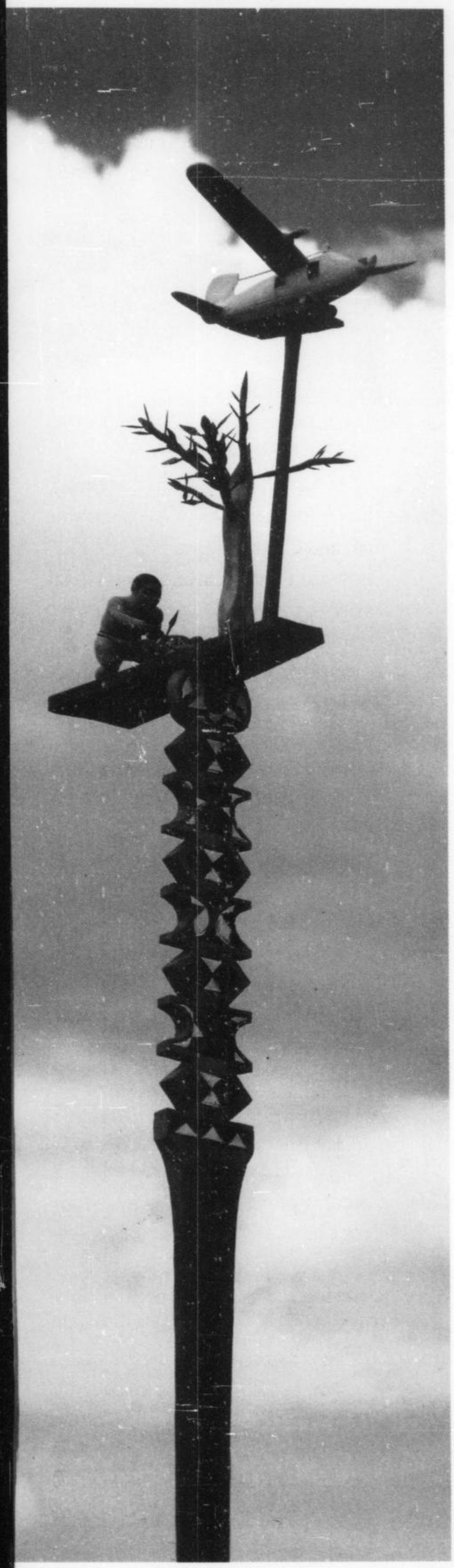
The French writer Julien Benda defined intellectuals as a group which should be concerned with universal issues. Their role in the face of today's chaotic, divisive realities should be to free themselves from manichaean, reductionist thinking in order to identify the values common to people everywhere.

Their task is not to promise a paradise on Earth, but to encourage respect for others and for their beliefs. It is not to impose an ideal world, but to help exorcize what is worst in the present one—xenophobia, intolerance and exclusion. ■

NEDA EL KHAZEN

Progress to what?

There is currently widespread disenchantment with the idea of progress, especially perhaps in those societies in which it has been the motor of economic growth and technological change. Should it be scrapped as the dubious legacy of an outworn ideology, or are there circumstances in which it is still valid?



***Aloalo Soroboko avisoa en pays Mahafaly* (1991-92), a painted wooden funerary sculpture (237 x 45 x 45 cm) by the Madagascan artist Efiaimbelo.**

A Western myth

by Régis Debray

ACCORDING to an old maxim, "Truth is one and error manifold". Strictly from the point of view of knowledge, it would be regrettable if North and South went their different ways. Both of them would do better to try to arrive at a correct and, therefore, shared understanding of progress, the characteristic myth of the early industrial age. Whether the idea of "progress" is an elaborate figment of the imagination or a conventional but illusory representation of reality, it is eminently emblematic of what used to be called "ideology".

The illusion comes from confusing two time-schemes, the *cumulative* time of "scientific and technological development", which is linear and marked by constant innovation, and *repetitive* time, which belongs to the world of politics and symbols. In the former time-scheme, ever more efficient solutions are found to quantifiable problems. In the latter, each generation discovers, and immediately forgets, that certain problems will never be solved.

Human groups have often adopted a less flexible language or a cruder religion, or exchanged democracy for dictatorship, but they have never been known to go back from the plough to the hoe, from wheels to sticks, or from aircraft to hot-air balloons. Just as living things do not regress (genetic combinations become progressively more and more complex), so, in the medium and long term, technology does not go into reverse. Objects tend towards perfection, and tools and skills are continually being improved under their

own momentum. This trend can be found throughout history and all over the world, independent of ethnic factors. The relationship between people and things is governed by a predictable, though open-ended and non-programmable, logic of progress.

Relationships between human beings clearly obey other laws. The difference between "savage" and "civilized" peoples has some discernible meaning in the history of technology, but is meaningless in the history of art, religions, languages or forms of authority. Our command of energy sources has increased a thousandfold since the beginning of our era, but Martin Luther King is not a thousand times greater a moral authority than Jesus Christ. The computer represents an advance on the abacus, but Andy Warhol is not superior to Titian, nor is Husserl's philosophy more "profound" than Plato's. The notion of progress is without meaning in the symbolic, intellectual, emotional or psychological realms. It would be easy to show that it is equally meaningless in the realm of politics—the wars of the twentieth century have been more brutal and bloody than those of the nineteenth, which were already much deadlier than those of the eighteenth, and so on. In relation to the technological and scientific ways and means of dealing with objects—or of human beings as objects, in the field of medicine—there is an objective and verifiable "before" and "after". In the forms of man's domination over man, the only "before and after" is purely subjective, and reversible.

Portrait of a woman at her toilet
(oil on canvas, c. 1512-1515) by the Venetian master Titian.

Standard technology, specific cultures

The noble advocates of progress who for two centuries have lumped together technological and political time, have been systematically wrong in their forecasts. They predicted not only that the railways would bring about world peace and that electricity would lead to social harmony and public education to the end of religious superstitions, but also that the standardization of technical objects would result in that of cultures and religions. The emergence of a human mega-race or, more accurately, the superseding of the ethnically-based structuring of human communities, was supposed to go hand-in-hand with the emergence of the productive mega-system, or globalized industrial production system. However, far from dissolving in a converging, globalized, fast-changing technological environment, ethnic environments, territorially based and slow to change, are turning inward, becoming more intransigent, and proliferating. The globalization trend is towards balkanization, each stage in the movement towards technological and economic unity reactivating ethnic and cultural diversity at a new level. The increasingly easy flow of goods and information is paralleled by an obsessive territorial neurosis. In a village that is increasingly global *and* chauvinistic, feverish migratory movements have as their counterpart a crisis-level siege mentality.

It is thus easy to imagine a principle of constancy at work in society, similar to the principle of stability posited for the psyche by Freudian metapsychology, a constant relationship between the factors of so-called progress and so-called regression. The history of humanity is recorded in a double-entry ledger. Each imbalance brought about by a technological advance causes an "ethnic" rebalancing, so that the present seesawing between the trend towards world-wide uniformity and demands for the right to be different, between the "rational" and the "national", between the economic imperative and religious needs—this whole dynamic of disequilibrium could be interpreted as a zero-sum game, or rather as an equation with variable but correlated values. This is pure speculation, of course.

In any case, let us admire the infinite superiority of the wisdom of Greek mythology over our present-day economic myths. In the myth of Protagoras, Zeus grants technical skills, or *techne*, to the human race through Prometheus but is glad to have kept the "art of administering public life", or wisdom, to himself, out of man's reach. The Enlightenment philosophers forgot this little reservation.

The verifiable *fact* of scientific and technological progress became a myth by being improperly transposed to the symbolic and political realms, a transposition stemming from the late encounter between religious messianism and

industrial machinism, between a Judaeo-Christian cultural tradition (progress as a secularized form of Providence) and the initial industrial and economic take-off of European societies. Out of the chemical reaction between them came a precipitate that settled out in France and England at the end of the Age of Enlightenment, philosophically linked with the names of Turgot, Condorcet and Comte. The nineteenth century saw the new religion spread throughout the world, in step with Western expansion, which of course was at the same time military, political, economic and *mythological.*

***Four Marilyns*, a 1962 work by the American pop artist Andy Warhol.**

The end of an ideology

The metaphysicians of progress believed the indivisibility of humanity to be the only subject of history. For Condorcet the human spirit and for Comte the human race are one, and the oneness of all history proceeds from this world-wide homogeneity. In north and south, east and west, humanity marches in the same direction, and mere variations in speed are not enough to change that direction or the order of events. In this view of the world, the continents may not be in the same time zone, but they all have the same watch and the same calendar. The East must necessarily make up lost time and join the West on its march—a postulate common to both market economists and Marxists. The ideologies of progress therefore predate ethnography, anthropology, positivism and, *a fortiori*, the eulogizing of differences.

The choice between tradition and progress, the closed and the open, may be a retrograde legacy of nineteenth-century Europe. It is perhaps because they cultivate their originality and historically exceptional character that the Japanese so successfully absorb outside influences. At the Seville Expo 92, the most efficiently perfoı ming country on Earth was represented not by video gadgetry but by a wooden Shinto temple. The super-modern East is forging ahead of the modern West because, in its symbolic structures, it has already reached the stage of pine, while we are still at that of fibrocement.

Nothing could be more pointless than, for example, the rhetorical antithesis between "nationalism" and "cosmopolitanism". It has been the global tribes, formidably rooted in their indigenous identities and at the same time networking all over the planet—the Arabs of the Middle Ages, the Jews of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and the British of the Industrial Revolution—who have always moved civilization forward.

Globally positive

The myth of progress continues to operate, in a latent or residual way in the North, in a driving and propulsive manner in the South. An idea that has been to a greater or lesser extent mythologized but is accepted by all becomes an objective social reality, to be treated as such, especially since, in the Third World in particular, it still plays a "globally positive" role. Just as contempt for money is a privilege of the rich, scepticism with regard to progress is the prerogative of those who have historically benefitted from it. Political redemption through technological progress is a false idea that the poor and oppressed truly need to cling to in order to face up to modernity and its gruesome spectacle of injustices without sinking into despair or delinquency.

The problem is that the affluent West no longer really believes in its ideals and myths of redemption. After the collapse of socialism, we in the North no longer look forward to a future where a clean break with the past can improve our lot. What we see ahead are not radical changes to be carried out but improvements to be made within the framework of the rational, democratic state. This is called "managing". The hope principle is defunct at its home base. Can it, should it be extinguished worldwide?

Its extinction would put a cheap price on human suffering. Doubling average life expectancy in the span of a century, wiping out diseases, lowering illiteracy rates and boosting potential per capita energy consumption are elevating, worthy tasks that, though they do not

hold the key to long-term human happiness or usher in the classless society, at least have the enormous merit of narrowing the gap between the two hemispheres.

In the short run, it is clear that North and South are instinctively nursing two opposing attitudes towards History and hence towards progress. Orphaned by the present, the "South", unable to take refuge in a past that only evokes worse conditions, turns its eyes towards the future, which is identified with a better life. Orphaned by the future, the North has refocused on its present, which it no longer sees by the light of Utopia but by that of the past, glorifying memory above all other civic virtues. Europe is passionately building up its archives, recording everything, creating museums of all kinds and exulting in commemorations and anniversaries. Yesterday's forward-looking and messianic outlook has been replaced by a backward-looking or antiquarian view of history, in which we are no longer active participants but nostalgic, wistful onlookers. Nature was once a "conservative" value opposed to History. Ecology, the only new or rising political movement, mythologizes nature to rally support. Back to the land, to local communities, traditions and threatened ways of life is the order of the day. Even the idea of the Republic, as the author of these lines upholds it in the French context, can be interpreted as a form of "return to the past" in the face of the communalist and mercantile tendencies of the now dominant, devastating Anglo-Saxon model of democracy. "Preserving" is once again a positive, even chic if not avant-garde term. It seems as if, faith in the future having taken refuge among the poorest inhabitants of the planet, the rich are getting used to seeing progress not as the pursuit of a better world but, to quote Milan Kundera, as "the forerunner of the worst", and they have good reasons to do so.

The danger lies in the advantage thus gained by nihilism and cynicism. If progress is dead, then anything goes. The law that says "the winner takes all" is the law of a self-sufficient present where making money fast and in any way possible becomes the individual's supreme ideal.

The solution doubtless lies not in creating yet another utopia or a new secular messianism, but perhaps in waging a series of specific, single-minded, ethically-based struggles, if not to achieve the *ideal best*, then at least to steer clear of the *real worst*. And today the worst seems to us to be the very dilemma that the course of events would like to lock us into: either, in the name of modernity, to transform the planet into a supermarket, subjecting all public and private human activity to the law of supply and demand; or, in the name of identity, to shut ourselves off in vindictive fantasies of a return to some lost purity, to the exclusion of those who are different from ourselves, and to the integrity of an ideology, community or religious belief. To exchange the *technocratic* myth that technological progress is all it takes to solve political and cultural problems, for the *ideocratic* frenzy that claims a fine-sounding moral norm can take the place of economic and technological solutions, would simply be to exchange a caricature from the North for a caricature from the South. Another kind of public life could be reinvented in the middle ground between the politics of the dollar and the various politics of God, that would be worthy of the Enlightenment philosophers but without their illusions, and that would combine the pessimism of intelligence with the optimism of the will. The lie must, in short, be given to all those who believe that every criticism of the myth of progress is necessarily reactionary. ■

***Way Ahead*, a photo by Eddie Sethna**

RÉGIS DEBRAY
is a French philosopher, essayist and novelist. Among his works published in English are *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals and Modern France* (1985) and *Critique of Political Reason* (1983).

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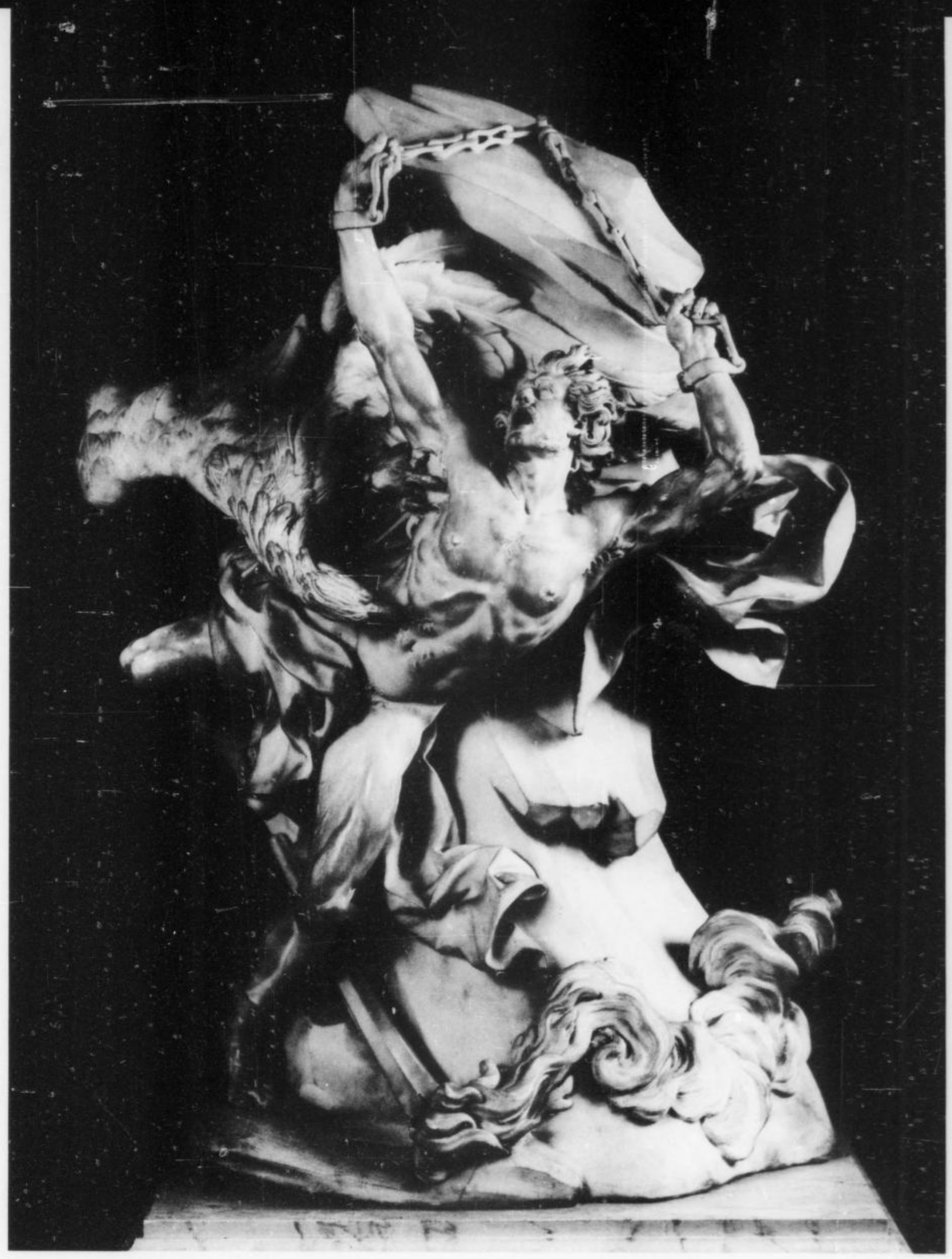


Prometheus Bound **(1762), a marble group by the French sculptor Nicolas Sébastien Adam.**

Metaphors should be made at home

by Daniel J. Boorstin

THE Western idea of progress, widespread since the eighteenth century, had its roots in two characteristically Western ideas and experiences. First, the Judaeo-Christian belief in a Creator God who had made the world new; and second, the rise of experimental science and the work of Galileo, Harvey, Newton and others, who documented man's increasing ability to know and control the world. These ideas and experiences were at odds with the cyclical views of history presumed by other world-religions, and even in the classical Greek heritage. If God could make the world *ex nihilo*, and man shared the powers of that God, then making the new was not only possible for man, it revealed his spark of divinity.

The Western enthusiasm for the natural sciences was contagious, inspiring social sciences which aimed to make new and better institutions. As scientific knowledge accumulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was encouraged and shared by the European community, with an increasing faith in its utopian possibilities. It was this faith which stirred the

beliefs of Jefferson and the American revolutionaries in the possibility of creating a new nation in a New World, pursuing the idea of human equality and rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It also inspired the beliefs of the French revolutionaries of 1789 in their power to clean out the cobwebs of the Old Regime, and make a new Republic dedicated to Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and the rule of Reason. The spectacular successes of European industry in the nineteenth century—the creation of steam power and then electrical power, along with the epochal insights of Adam Smith, Auguste Comte, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and others, with improvement of transportation, the growth of cities and the increase of wealth—reinforced the hope (in Tennyson's words) that it would be possible to "Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves of change."

Can such an idea, that grew from distinctively Western memory, experience, and imagination, take root and flourish elsewhere? Can it be credible in parts of the world that do not share the Judaeo-Christian belief in a Creator God, a God of Novelty, and in a Creator Man, Apostle of Novelty? Can the idea of progress survive in societies that lack the melodramatic Western triumphs of science and technology, that lack the rising standards of living, and have not succeeded in making viable societies by newly-drawn constitutions? Can peoples be expected to share the intellectual product when they had not shared the processes from which it came?

More basic, even, than the idea of progress in Western thought is the notion of which Blaise Pascal was the eloquent spokesman. "Man is but a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed." And, though the universe destroy man, man is still nobler, for he is aware of the advantage the universe has over him. Man's greatness, then, is in his consciousness, his awareness of his place in the world, of what the world holds and might hold for him, and what he might hold for the world. That consciousness has led man in the West to believe in progress. But where will that consciousness properly lead men who have lived in drastically different circumstances, with contrasting histories? While the idea of progress may be a suitable and suggestive metaphor for Western history, elsewhere, among peoples who have no similar historical roots, it may express nothing more than a bitter utopian irony.

Finally, how does it benefit the world when people freeze the metaphors of alien history into ideology? For ideology itself is a contradiction and denial of man's endless powers of novelty and change which are suggested by the very idea of progress. Would we not, perhaps, profit more from the diversity of human experience if we encouraged all peoples to make their own metaphors? ■

DANIEL J. BOORSTIN
is a leading American historian who was Librarian of Congress from 1975 to 1987. His many books include a trilogy, *The Americans*, *The Image* and *The Discoverers*. His latest work, *The Creators*, a history of human achievements in the arts, was published by Random House in 1992.

An illustration for *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* (1786) shows Baron de Crac reaching for the Moon.

Relative values

by Flora Lewis

'CAN North and South share the same idea of progress?" This is a provocative question which I must answer yes and no. On one level, everybody has the same basic needs—adequate food, shelter, health care and a sense of dignity. The "South", in its metaphorical meaning of the poorest societies, is still a long way from reaching these standards. Moving towards them would certainly be seen as "progress" both by themselves and by those already much better off. But even in flat material and physical terms, the idea is not so simple. The population explosion in global terms is the result of a dramatic reduction in mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy. Women aren't having more babies than a century ago in poor societies, but a lot more babies are reaching adulthood thanks to scientific and technological advances, which move geometrically while economic development moves far more slowly.

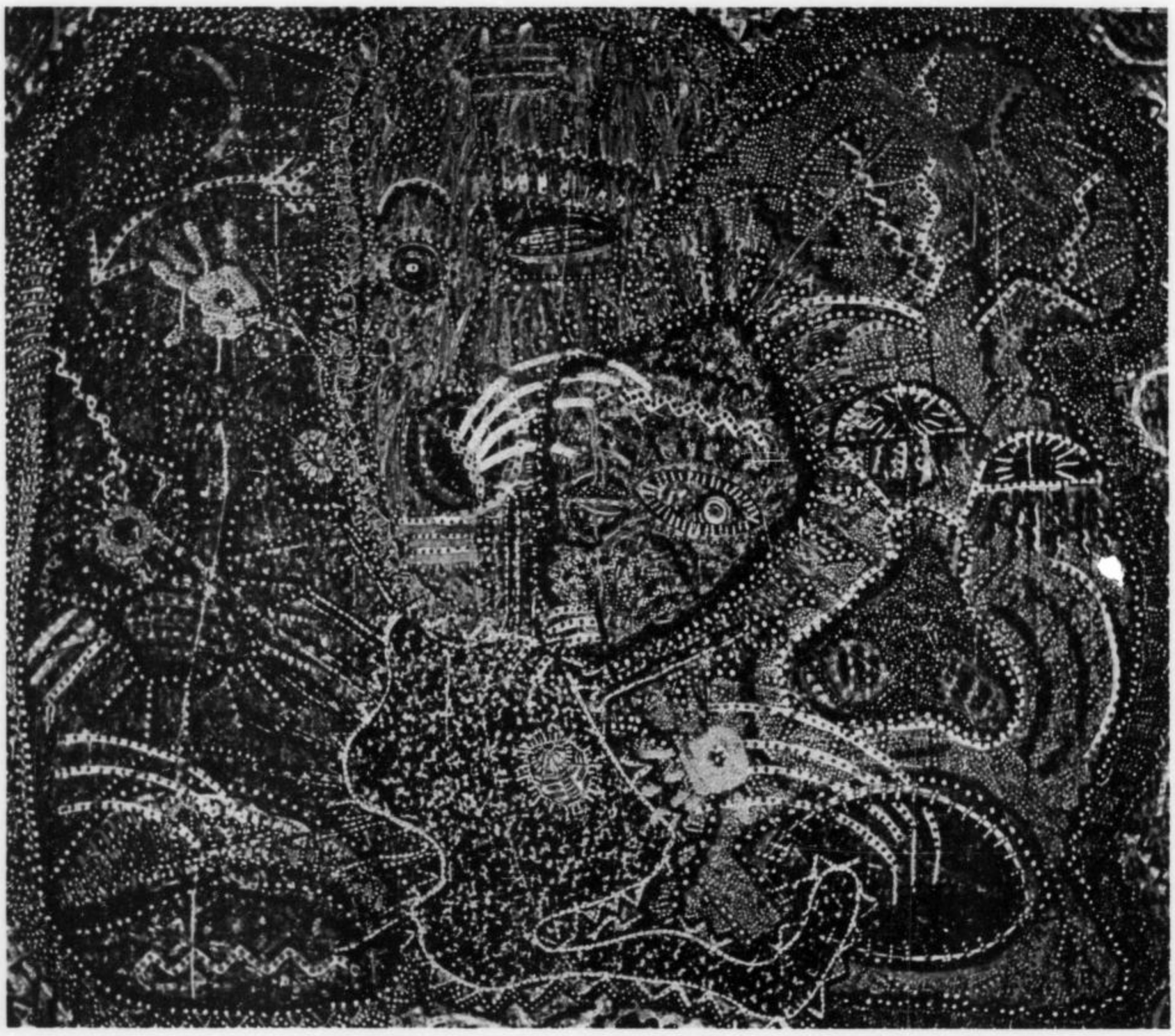
Poverty increases because there are a lot more people, and in some cases it increases absolutely because of the consequent strain on resources—desertification (in the Sahel, for example), deforestation, soil erosion and so on. The fact that more people stay alive may be considered progress, but the fact that they live so badly, sometimes worse than their ancestors, cannot be. The prosperous tend to have far fewer children, who live better. Is that progress? Yes, they feel it is. So this idea of material improvement is shared.

Yet, still in strictly material terms, above the level of absolute misery, poverty and progress are felt as relative conditions and inequality measured by immediate surroundings can seem more important. The rioters in South Central Los Angeles last year certainly consider themselves poor. They live in a city which flaunts wealth and luxury, they watch TV which not only urges ever more consumption but takes them inside the homes of the well-to-do for a vicarious taste of ease and comfort. They themselves are enormously better off than many hundreds of millions in Africa, Latin America and Asia, but they do not make such a comparison. Why should they? They live in a society which preaches democracy, equity and justice, and they feel it has failed to deliver to them. Is this progress? Perhaps, in the sense that they do not simply accept their lot in resignation but look for one way or another to improve it, making their demands heard. This idea of progress is probably also shared.

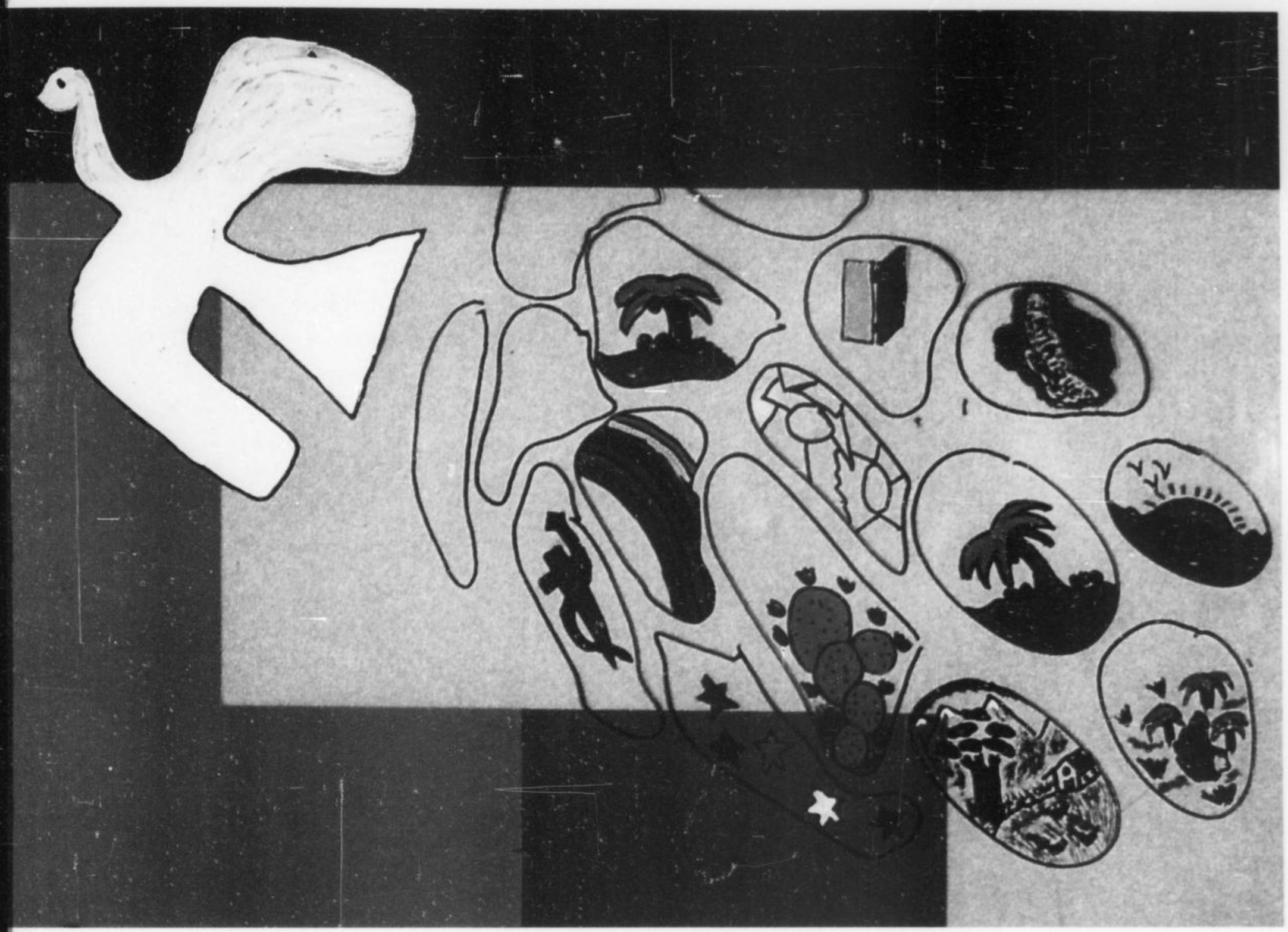
A challenge to the will of God

But even in those societies which do believe in progress, at least as possible, if no longer inevitable, in the Victorian tenet, there is no longer such conviction about what it really is. Some cultures reject the whole idea as hubris, an unworthy challenge to the will of God. There is considerable confusion between "modernization" and "progress". Are they synonymous, opposites, or simply different? All can be argued, though the urge to modernize making use of science and technology, economic development, greater autonomy, is very widespread, even among such groups as fundamentalists who think of restoring a golden age rather than "progressing" toward an unknown future.

Progress suggests a certain philosophical and moral content, as well as material improvement, and that, like beauty and justice, can be in the eye of the beholder. The image of the ideal society which would be the ultimate goal of progress is not shared, not only among cultures, but not even within them. I would maintain that there are and always will be arguments because there is a permanent tension between the consciousness of man as an individual and man as a member of a community. Both are essential. According to varying circumstances and perceptions, which change with time and place as



***Carnaval* (1986), mixed media on card (170 x 130 cm), by the Cuban painter Julio García Fortes.**



***Mille couleurs* (1989), a design for a fresco by Daoud Krouri.**

well as with cultural traditions, one or the other need is felt to be more urgent. Sooner or later, efforts to meet the one will lead to a feeling of intolerable constraint on the other, forcing a change of perceptions. This is why I reject Francis Fukuyama's idea of an "end of history" even in his narrow Hegelian sense. The social versus individual dilemma is inherent in the human condition and will never be resolved. Therefore, I do not see how the idea of progress can mean much more than providing human satisfaction, which is inevitably an elusive, evanescent state.

A sense of void

Modern industrial society ordered by democratic government, which I assume is what is meant by "North", has indeed gone a long way towards satisfying certain needs, compared to previous periods. But it also contains deep frustrations and a sense of growing void, flagrantly displayed in the drug culture. I suppose this is what Malraux meant in saying "the twenty-first century will be spiritual or it will not be". The North has been unable to explain that void, and therefore has come to doubt the reality of progress. The "South" sees the failings and looks for a different, more encompassing idea of progress with greater warmth, more human consolation and less alienation, though it hasn't been able to explain it either.

There are differences of emphasis, and in this sense, no, the idea of progress is not shared.

That need not and should not be divisive or confrontational. There is still much to communicate and share and enrich in all ways, providing we do not fall into the trap of blaming "the enemy" for all that goes wrong, as we used to blame "God's will". Nor do I think it matters very much whether we all have the same idea of progress. Absolute conviction, certainty about the ultimate in human affairs, social blueprints, provide the one approach that is sure to be wrong, and they have been the source of a great deal of the harm people have done to each other. It is as well that we try out different ways of seeking to fulfill our hopes and aspirations, mindful that we all do have them. ■

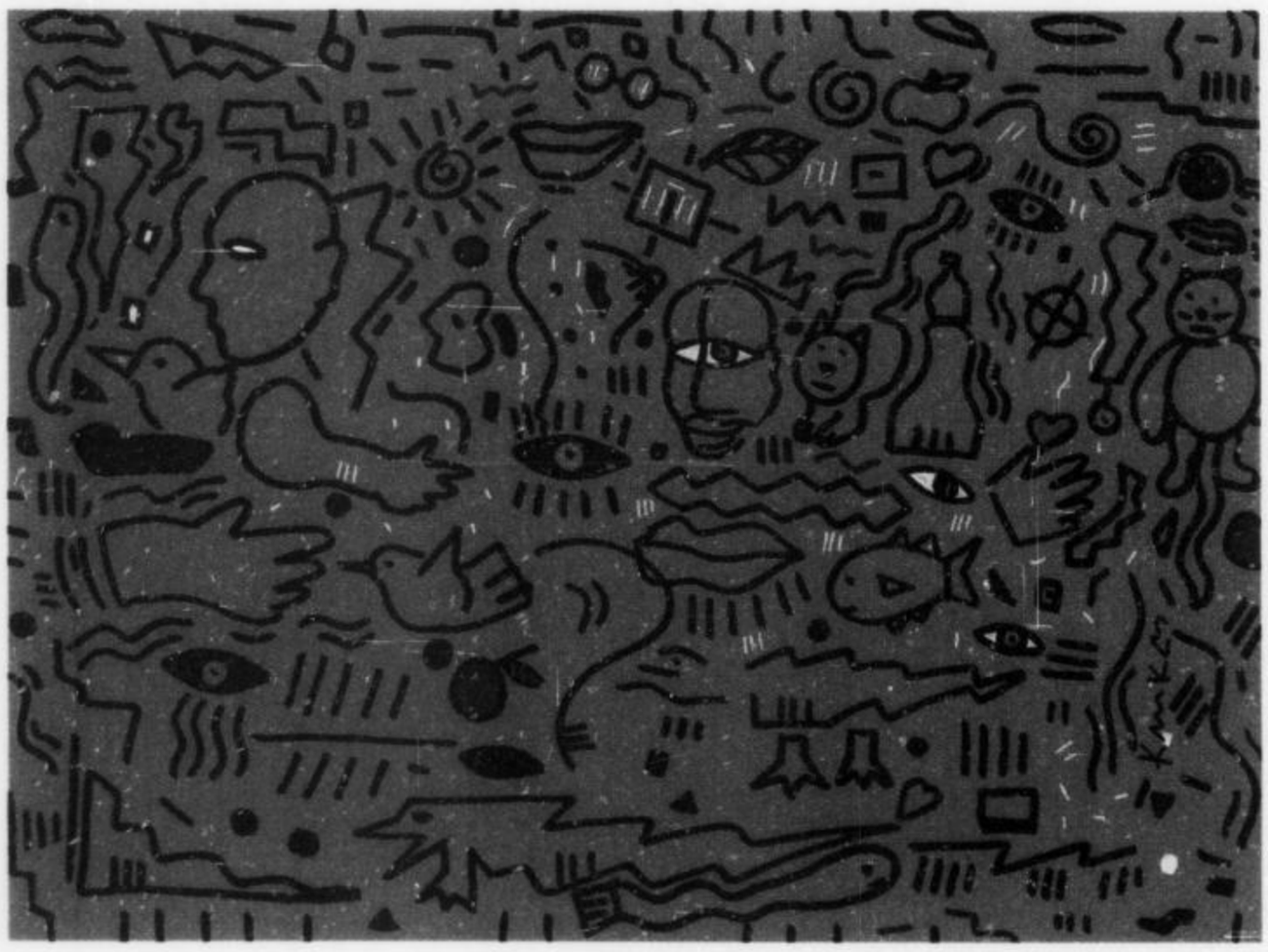
FLORA LEWIS
is a distinguished American journalist who is Senior Columnist with *The New York Times*, for which she writes a twice-weekly column on foreign affairs. She is the author of several books including *Europe: Road to Unity* (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1992).

North-South: beyond the great divide

In a world divided between haves and have-nots, is domination the hidden face of progress? Or should we see progress within the context of a single world facing the same problems, albeit to different degrees? How far is it possible to imagine a definition of progress that would be universally applicable?

The universal and the particular

■ by Joseph Ki-Zerbo ■

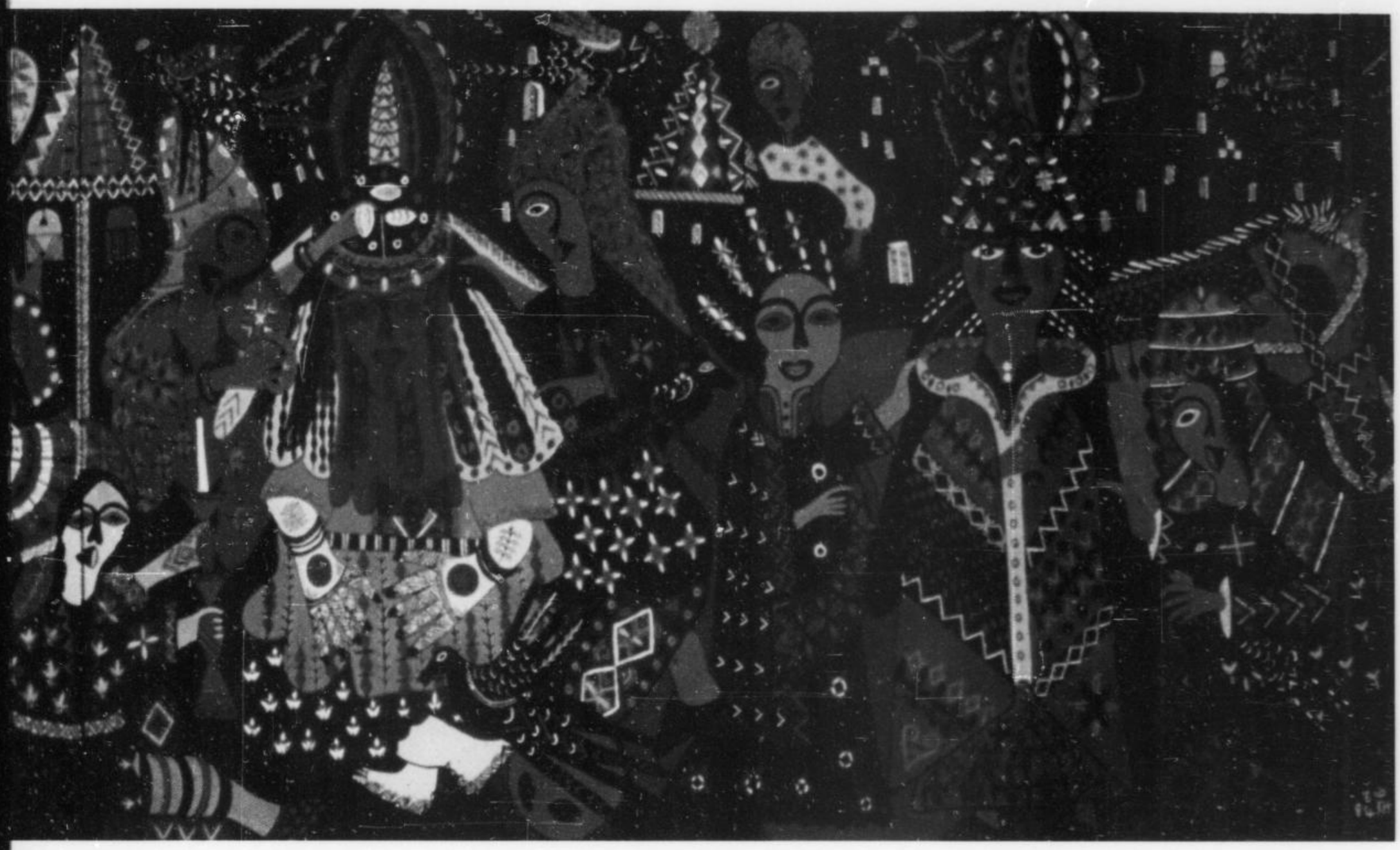


FOR some time, I have been arguing that the idea of universality is put forward by people in centres of power and places that dominate the rest of the world. The spectacle of the chaos reigning in the modern world impels us to fall back on this idea as though on a fortress. When danger threatens we use it like a lifebuoy, clinging to it because we feel that it can save the world.

Now terms such as the universal, progress and development need to be approached with great vigilance and in a critical spirit. I agree that we should talk about the universal, but without overlooking its counterpart, the particular; and we should relate them to each other dialectically rather than as a pair of opposites. The universal feeds on particular cases, and particular cases must make use of the universal.

This dialectical approach seems to me to revalidate the idea of the universal, providing it is agreed from the outset that there is a piece of the universal in every individual. As regards democracy, for instance, either we say that the democracy the world needs is of the type designed in the West—which is liable to be met with counter-arguments or even fierce objections to any such intrusion—or we seek to find in every culture some starting point or predisposition towards democracy.

To take the case of Africa, that continent's



Above, *Jour de fête* (1984), acrylic on canvas (100 x 300 cm), by the Moroccan-born artist Fatima Hassan. Below left, *Germination* (1992), by the Brazilian painter Kinkas.

history obviously contains advance pointers to the state as an institution based on the rule of law. Africans have a saying, "The king does not have royalty, royalty has the king", meaning that even a king is subject to a higher authority. This idea suggests that of the rule of law. I have confirmed this myself in the case of the emperor of the Mossi, who remained seated while people around him continually made suggestions as to what he should do. He was literally the first slave of law and custom.

This gives the lie to our modern African dictators, who claim that democracy has never existed in Africa and is an idea alien to our culture. Africans who think this ignore the reality of their culture and history. This type of particularism is to be avoided.

Or again, consider man's relationship with nature, with health, with life and death. In this area every culture has good and bad, positive and negative aspects. The universal must operate on the basis of positive particulars. None of us, I think, defends a "tribalization" of principles. The universality of human rights is a just idea for the simple reason that we all have a human identity. It is as human beings that we all claim the application of these rights.

On the subject of progress, I recently wrote, "It's all very well to move fast as long as you know where you're going". We cannot speak of progress solely in relation to means: the direction and purpose must be defined from the outset. In short, we cannot speak of progress without raising the question of ends: and this raises an ethical problem, since we have to choose a model or a plan for society. This aspect of the matter is often left out of the discussion. What kind of society do we want to build? In this context development has tended to mask—and even to promote—domination. Some Western leaders—I am thinking of Ronald Reagan in particular—have said, "They should do as we do!" On that basis, development becomes a way of imposing a predetermined model.

It is important to realize that the human and social sciences are lagging behind the other sciences. In my opinion no development is possible without the development of the former. In the last ten years the world has witnessed a multitude of events that no-one foresaw because far too much priority has been given to the sciences that contribute to material development. People have devoted themselves to the accessories of intelligence, to the detriment of the brainwork that is the prime mover of human progress.

We have reached the point where people's individuality has been dismembered, split into fragments. They have lost touch with certain transcendent values and they have lost their sense of community. By way of illustration of

JOSEPH KI-ZERBO, of Burkina Faso, is a noted historian who was general editor of the first volume of UNESCO's eight-volume *General History of Africa*. He is the author of a history of black Africa (*Histoire de l'Afrique noire*, 1978).

this process another picture comes to my mind—that of the god-king Osiris, whose body was chopped up into pieces by his brother before being put back together again. I believe that this Egyptian myth is relevant today to human society as a whole: it is time to reconstruct man and put him together again.

Intellectuals can play a crucial part in this respect, not only by weaving the dreams and myths that human beings need to give them a reason for living, but also by blazing the trail towards solidarity and mutual recognition on the basis of universal values. A Senegalese student recently said to me, "Professor, what we are interested in today is not development, but happiness." I was impressed by his remark. At a time when everyone is talking about progress and development, this young man brings us back to the essentials. No doubt people will say that happiness is as hard to define as progress. All the same, it is what we should be aiming for.

Universality as the West understands it is a truncated concept. It is based only on one sequence of history. I have often rebuked my Western colleagues for their lack of receptiveness to other histories, their hermetic approach, and their tendency to think that things have only been happening in the last four centuries. If they do go further back, it is to make ancient Greece the absolute starting point, forgetting that Greece was itself influenced by other histories, especially that of Egypt, which in turn owes much to Africa.

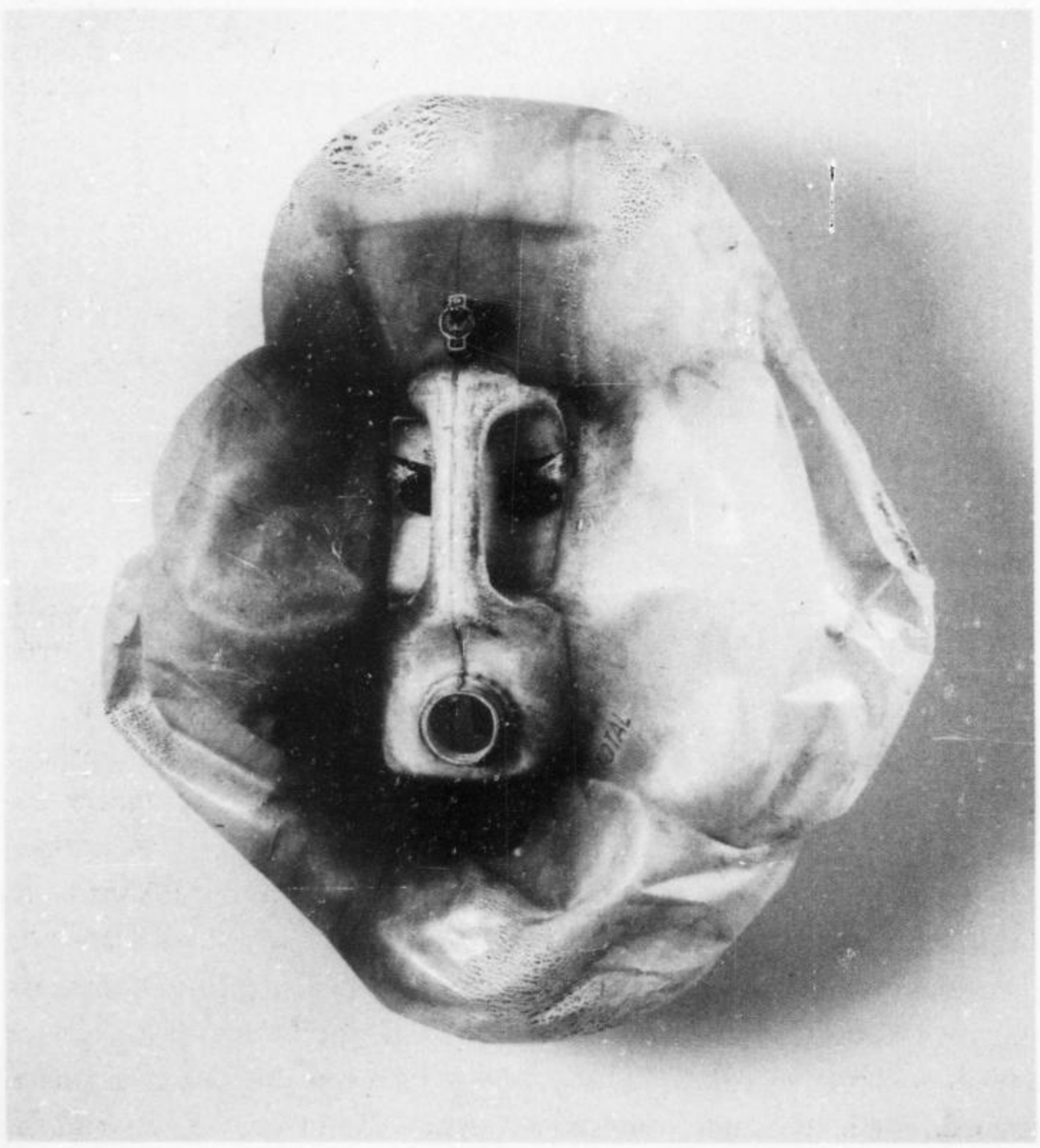
But let us go back to Ronald Reagan's position. It does not hold water. Take the question of energy consumption. If the world's per capita energy consumption was as high as that of North America, the consequences would be devastating. It is not enough to say that this model is undesirable; it is impossible. Wanting everyone to adopt it is a tragic mistake. Western thought, by persisting on this ecumenical path, actually tends towards exclusiveness.

Could we not get intellectuals to turn their attention seriously to this dialectic between the universal and the particular? This would lead to agreement on some intangible principles which hold good for all human beings, such as respect for life and man's relationship with nature and knowledge. What's the point of advocating universality when in my country 70 to 75 per cent of the population can neither read nor write? In Africa we are moving directly from an oral tradition to the post-industrial era of the audiovisual, skipping the crucial stage of writing.

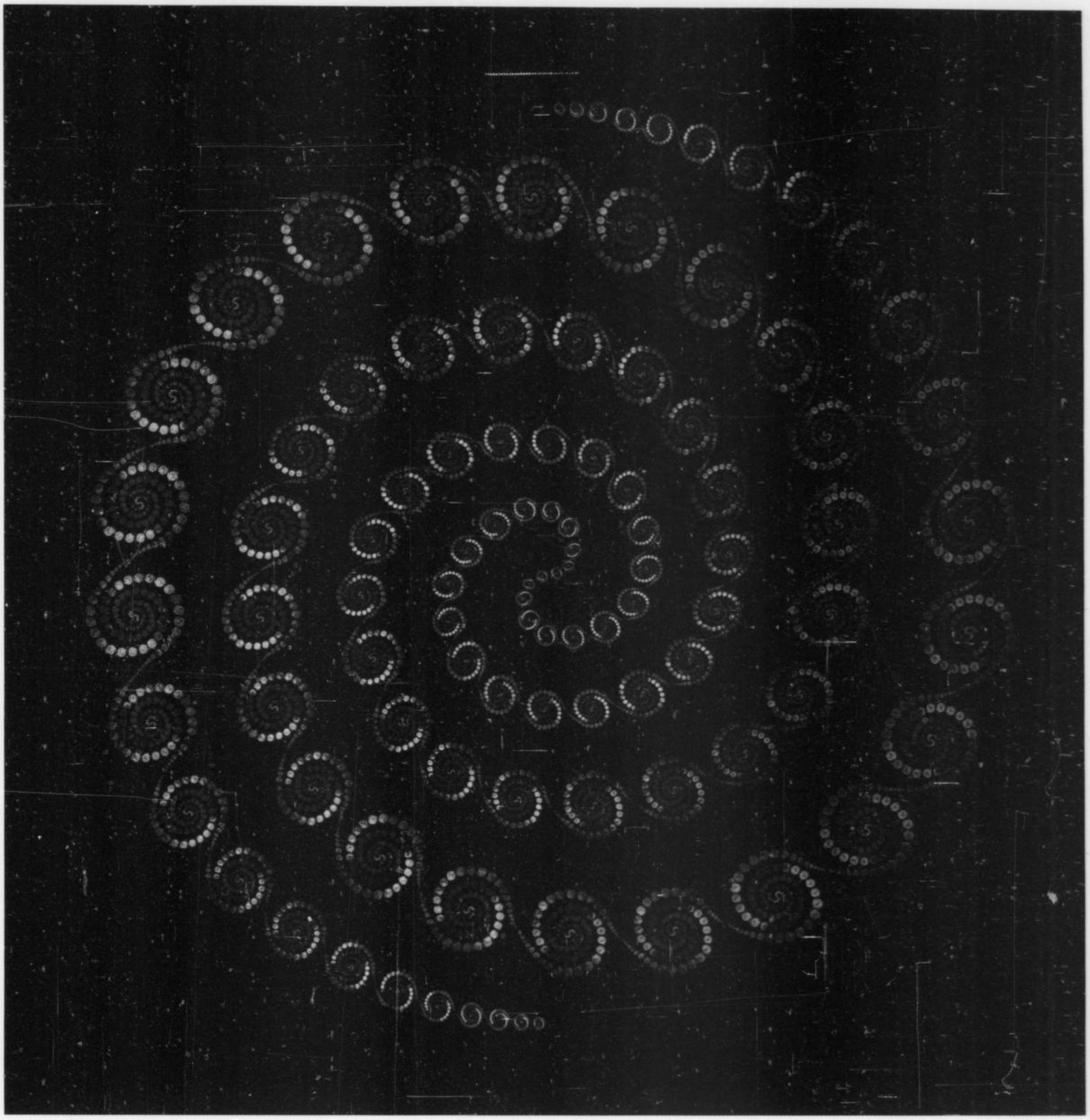
It is utopian to propose the application of universal values to peoples in situations where the conditions for this do not exist. The principle of intercommunication, whereby individuals get to know themselves and communities get to know each other, is essential. I have already suggested that the right to know oneself and to be known should be added to the list of basic human rights. Many people, especially in the developed countries, think nowadays that there is nothing interesting to be learned in the countries of the South. People who go there as tourists do not really enter into their histories, their cultures or their civilizations. This makes it impossible to achieve the "co-responsibility" we sometimes hear about.

The foundations of universality need to be strengthened and another organization of peoples established. People say that the United Nations Organization represents the peoples of the world, but today this is no longer true. States have gained the upper hand. They have been described as cold monsters, but I wonder whether they are not deep-frozen monsters.

Transcending the paradigm of the national state, a legacy of nineteenth-century Europe, seems to me one possible route to the universal. Modern man's technological achievements are creating new patterns, a new image of the world which makes this framework obsolete. We must transcend the nation-state and move towards the establishment of livelier and more receptive communities. Movement in that direction will bring us closer to the universal, and to progress. ■



***On/Off* (1991), a mixed-media work measuring 48 x 39 x 25 cm by Romuald Hazoumé, an artist from Benin.**



One world

by Alain Touraine

The Universe: a Thousand Billion Galaxies (1980-1990), a photomontage (100 x 100 cm) by the Russian painter George Kuzmin.

THE idea that the predominant trend is towards progress and universalism, with counter-currents running back towards religion and the irrational, is one that often seems to be taken for granted.

This view is far removed from reality. As concerns the West, there is another way of looking at things that seems to me much closer to the mark. The idea of progress was uppermost in the minds of certain intellectuals and statesmen for a century, but from 1870 onwards it was no longer discussed. The history of the West has been something quite different. Pushing paradox to its limits, I would even go so far as to say that if ever there was a time when people believed in progress, it was in the Middle Ages.

Modernity dismisses the idea of a general movement embracing nature, society and the

individual. These are becoming separate, distinct areas, and I think that political and cultural life in the West has been a matter of managing the relationships between them. On the one hand, the idea of progress has been shattered and supplanted by that of economic growth, and, on the other, an idea which is completely foreign to the very concept of progress has emerged, the idea of democracy, linked to that of individualism. None of the great eighteenth-century exponents of progress, including Rousseau as well as Voltaire, came out officially and openly in favour of democracy, quite the reverse. In fact, the concept of the nation, which first appeared in Germany, is the dominant concept of the twentieth century.

In other words, the history of the West does not chronicle the universal triumph of reason but the process of learning how to manage the relationship between economic growth—what we may call practical reason—and the ideas of nation and freedom.

This great current, previously moving in the direction of integration, is now moving, worldwide, in that of disintegration. We have the impression of living at a time when, to use expressions that are almost slogans, markets, tribes and individual consciousnesses are living in separate worlds. Society as such no longer exists. This is important. Any solution that calls for the world to be rebuilt around the individual, around the economy or around cultures, is destined to fail and can only end in disaster. In the world of today, the objectivity of markets is completely dissociated from the plurality of individual consciousnesses and cultures.

The West, and many other parts of the world, must now think how to live in accordance with several principles at the same time. The distinguishing feature of Western modernity is, I repeat, not the universalism of progress, but the combination of the universalism of reason, the particularity of nations—stronger, of course, in more recently-built nations such as Italy and Germany—and the universality of human rights, in other words, the combination of individualism and democracy.

I believe that this is the heart of the matter: not, above all, to argue the case for the universal against that of the particular, but to argue in favour of the need for a society, a country, a group of countries or the entire world to combine several principles. The desire to make societies one-dimensional—ethnically pure, dedicated to the rationale of the market or even entirely devoted to individual interests—is the fundamental danger today. In every part of the world, learning how to combine several principles is essential.

In my view it is crucial that these problems should be discussed in the context of one single world. I believe it has become dangerous to talk about "the third world", "the first world" and "the second world". It is dangerous to think even that a North-South divide exists. This is a misrepresentation. Today the same issues arise in both in *differing proportions*. Instead of saying that reason resides in the North, with all its flaws, while particularism reigns in the countries of the South, we should, I think, be stating this problem of combinations in the same terms for every part of the world; otherwise, there will be a head-on confrontation between those who argue that reason should be given priority and those who maintain that priority should be given to plurality and cultural diversity. ■

***Eyeing Out* (1993), a "collograph" or collage print by the Finnish artist Raija Patchett.**

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French sociologist, is director of studies and director of the Centre for Sociological Analysis and Intervention (CADIS) at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, Paris. Among his works published in English are *Return of the Actor* (1985) and *The Voice and the Eye: The Analysis of Social Movements* (1981).

The shadow of oppression

■ by Tariq Banuri ■

Camp Followers (1926), oil on canvas (81 x 95.5 cm), by the Mexican painter José Clemente Orozco.

IF the world were a single country, it would be a "third world" country. Reduced to scale, the aggregate economic, social and environmental characteristics of the whole world are the same as those of a typical third world country. The inequality of wealth, consumption and power, the diversity of cultures, religions and languages and the degree and nature of conflicts over these differences, the diversity of genes and species and the rates at which they are being extinguished—where can one find these today but in the South?

But the parallel runs deeper than levels of inequality, diversity or violence. There is what may be called an absence of a collective community. Just as there is no such thing as a global community, in southern societies there is no such thing as a national community. Think about a reduction in global consumption levels to accommodate the environmental crisis, and ask

whether there can be a general agreement over whose consumption ought to be sacrificed. Should the poor die to enable the rich to live in the style they have been accustomed to, or should the rich give up centuries of progress and revert to what they might view as a sub-human form of consumption in order to let the poor survive? It is relatively easy to answer this question within the national boundaries of northern societies, but very difficult to do so at the global level.

Thus the question "can the North and South share the same idea of progress?" can be reformulated more simply as "can the population of a southern country share the same idea of progress—or have any idea of progress at all?" In other words, instead of looking for a consensus *between* the North and the South, let us begin by looking at how the basis for consensus in the South differs from that in the North.

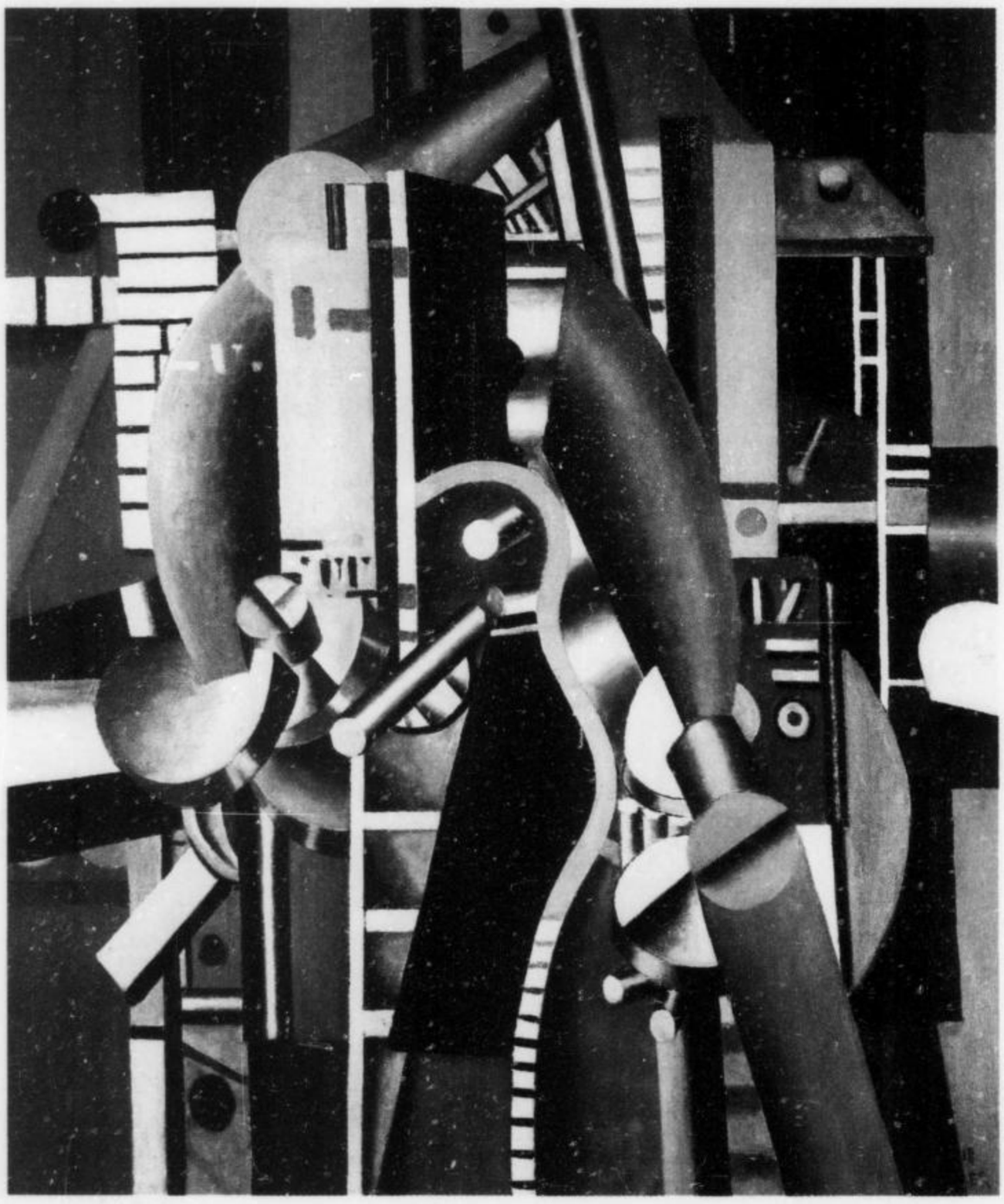
A concept that continues to possess deep resonance is colonialism. It is possible to portray the conflict over progress as one between two contrasting attitudes towards colonialism. This conflict squares off the (unconscious) champions or legitimizers of colonialism against its critics. Half a century after the supposed demise of colonial rule, these two strands have not moved towards a synthesis. On the contrary, one can sense already the distant rumblings of a revival of colonialism, first within the South itself, and later across the globe. There is a grave danger that from the standpoint of history the second half of the twentieth century will appear as but a brief interruption in the long march of colonial rule.

One can be somewhat polemical here. It seems that while the discussion of progress solely in terms of outcomes is legitimate in the North (presumably because there is a consensus over institutions and processes, the so-called end of history), this is not possible in the South, where there is a continuing history of powerlessness and injustice. If this is so, then the overall objective of progress (growth, conservation) may be less important in the South than the mechanism through which the objective is to be achieved. It may make sense in the North to formulate theories of salvation (which, in the words of Ashis Nandy, "do not save, but only justify action in the present"), but understanding in the South cannot begin without a theory of oppression.

In other words, the legitimacy of the idea of "progress" in large parts of the southern population would depend on our ability to formulate it, to use Nandy's words again, in terms of "the expansion of the awareness of oppression". In general, neither the North nor the elites of the South have defined progress in this manner.

This was most evident in the discussions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which was itself a major attempt to define a shared idea of progress in the face of impending catastrophe. The North viewed itself as Noah building an Ark to defend us from the deluge; the South saw itself as Jesus being sacrificed on the cross for the sins of humanity. The North sought to focus on technology and organization, the South on politics and injustice. The story of UNCED is meaningless to one who sees only the shaping of a piece of wood but not whether it will bear the weight of Noah or of Jesus. ■

***The Motor* (1918), oil on canvas (135 x 118 cm) by Fernand Léger.**



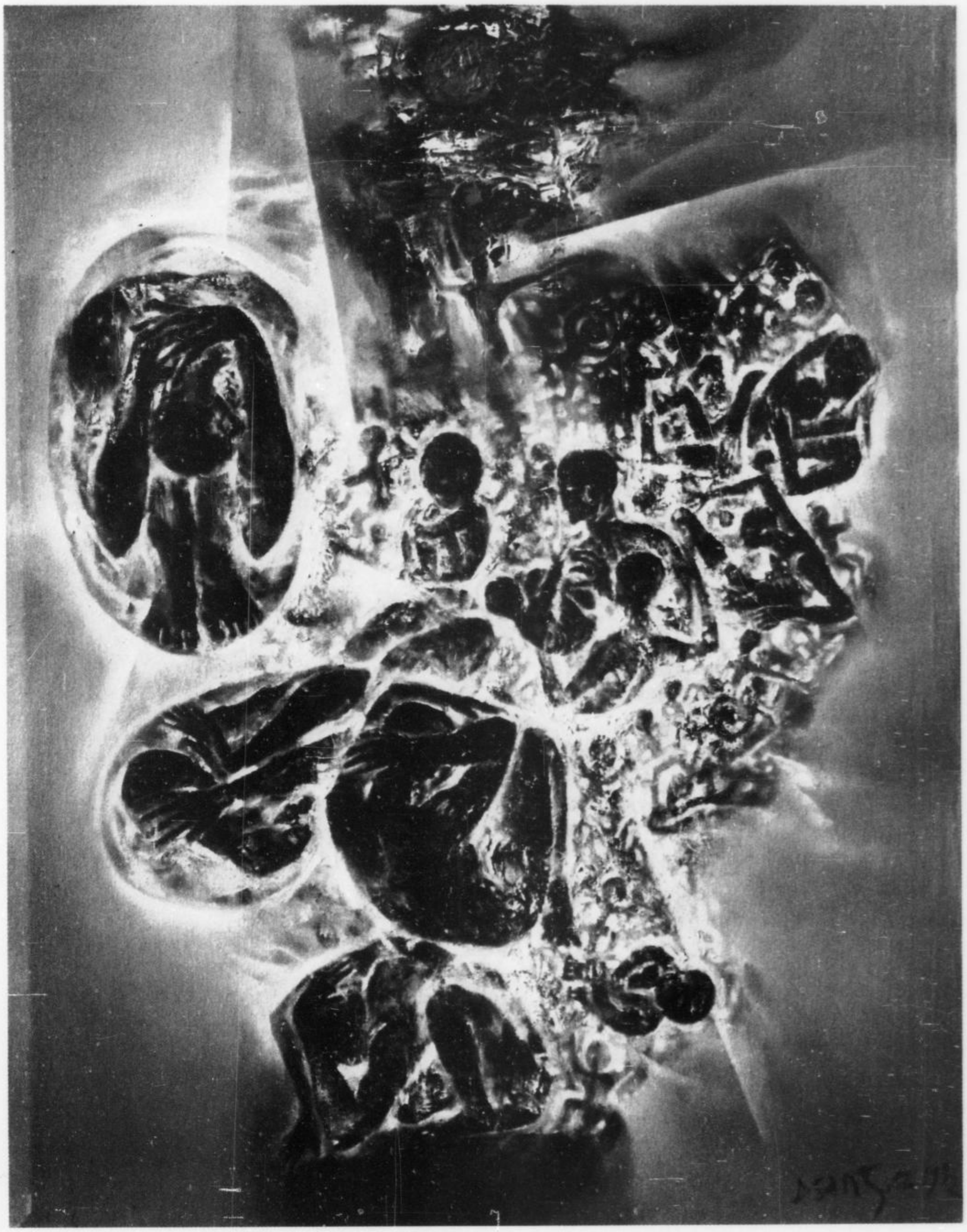
TARIQ BANURI
is a Pakistani writer and journalist.

A shared crisis

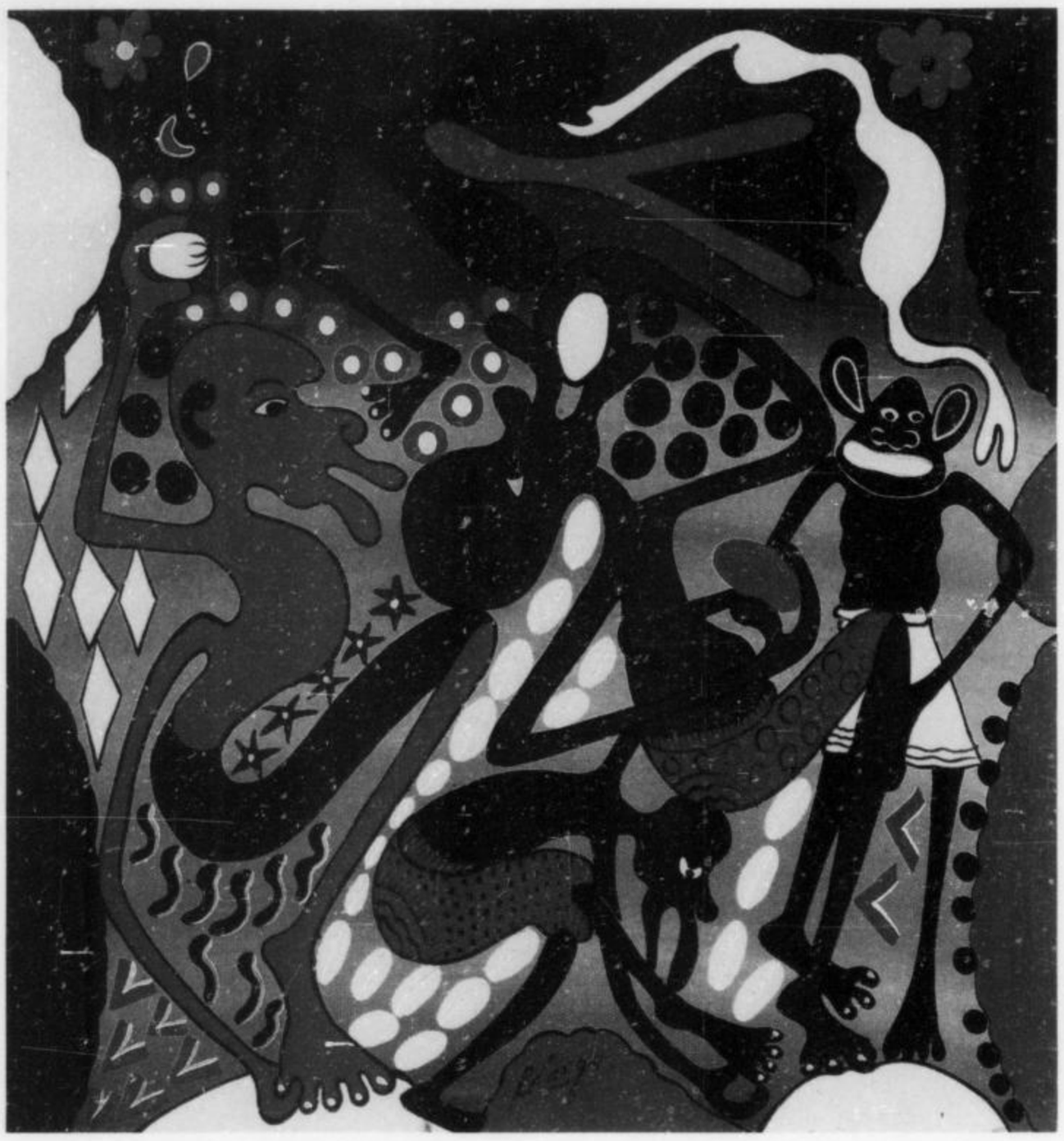
by Edgar Morin

We must realize, and make sure others realize, that we all share the same destiny. Unity, in this global age, means that we have a common destiny, of life and of death. The universal is no longer abstraction, but specific, because what is at stake is the fate of a specific planet and its specific inhabitants, facing the specific problems of life, death and progress.

The idea of progress, doubtless the key concept of the modern Western world, became current during the eighteenth and nineteenth



The Human Condition **(1992), oil on canvas (80 x 60 cm) by the Vietnamese painter Duong Dinh Sang.**



***Je mwezangu matunda haya matamu (Do these Fruits Taste Good?)*, 1992, acrylic on plywood (61.5 x 61 cm) by the Tanzanian artist George Lilanga di Nyama.**

centuries and has since become universal. The idea of progress seemed to be a veritable law governing the way the world would evolve. It was based on the scientific determinism that then predominated—a kind of historical law that could be represented in various ways, that of Auguste Comte as well as that of Karl Marx. It seemed to have been reinforced by the idea that biological evolution started out with single-cell creatures and ended up with human beings, and to be supported by developments, which could only be beneficial, in science and in the faculty of reason. In other words, the idea that spread was that of progress as being necessary and inevitable. World wars and other setbacks seemed to be merely unfortunate accidents caused by the death throes of reactionary and anti-progressive forces.

Furthermore, the concept of development, which itself became generally accepted after the Second World War, gave rise to a kind of technological and economic model of progress in which economic growth emerged as, so to speak, the only driving force needed for every form of human progress, including opportunities for personal fulfilment. This conception completely obscured the havoc wreaked by growth and technological and economic development on cultures, in Europe to begin with, but on a much greater scale in the rest of the world.

Progress, that is to say the future, is today in crisis, a crisis of which there were already premonitory signs before the war but which is now omnipresent. It affects the entire world, and especially the developing countries, since it has become clear that both the Western and Eastern models of development have most often ended in failure.

The crisis started brewing in the totalitarian regimes of the East, whose promise of a radiant future for mankind has crumbled in recent years, but it has also affected the West, where no-one, and rightly so, any longer believes in historical or even physical determinism. The realization has dawned that science can manipulate, enslave and destroy as well as benefit humanity, and certain half-baked forms of reasoning—thinking that, in the abstract, is logical but is bereft of any empirical basis—have been spread abroad, masquerading as "reason".

I therefore believe that we are experiencing, in various forms, a shared crisis of progress whose globalization I also believe to be the reason why people today are turning back to the ethnic group or to religion. When the future is lost and the present unhappy, miserable and distressing, the past is all that is left. I feel that our primary duty is to discard the idea of mechanical progress based exclusively on a technological and economic foundation.

We should realize that underlying the idea of progress was the idea of "a better life", lived decently and with a civilized respect for others. The idea of progress must henceforward be governed by this ethical imperative, thus becoming something desirable and possible rather than an inescapable mechanism.

In my opinion this means that we must abandon the linear perspective according to which there was an advanced world, a backward world and a primitive world, all of which had to share the same conception. It must be acknowledged that every civilization or culture is a blend of the most diverse ingredients—superstitions, arbitrary beliefs, profound truths and age-old wisdom—and that this includes Europe, which also has its truths, its myths and its illusions, starting with the illusion of progress.

Rethinking the idea of progress is becoming a priority. ■

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

TREATING NATURE WITH REVERENCE

BY FRANCE BEQUETTE

Two young men emerge from the Sacred Forest at the end of an initiation ceremony (Côte d'Ivoire).

If the inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal south of Myanmar had not remained faithful to traditional ways of managing the resources of their ecosystem, the environment in which they live would not have survived for long. Some of the archipelago's twenty-two unequally-sized islands are sparsely-wooded, while others are covered with dense forests that are home to rare tree species. A few of them, such as Car Nicobar and Chowra, are overpopulated, but no one goes hungry and everyone can get hold of enough wood to build a house and a fishing boat. According to a study carried out by G. Prakash Reddy, professor of social anthropology at the university of Tirupati (India), the balance between forests, grasslands and farmland is respected. Whenever a villager needs grass to roof his house or wood to repair it, he asks the island Council. Anyone who cuts down a tree must replant one of the same species in the same spot. The Council recommends burning dried coconut shells and waste vegetable matter for cooking, except for great feasts, when dead wood is used. During one of the traditional ceremonies that punctuate the year, pigs are sacrificed so that there are not too many of them when food for people and livestock becomes scarce.

The example of the Nicobar Islands shows that, contrary to widespread belief, some of the planet's inhabitants did not wait until the 1970s before starting to take care of their environment.

TREATING NATURE WITH REVERENCE

Social and religious traditions on every continent have helped to manage nature without destroying it.

Travellers in the west African savanna, for example, can see dense forests or copses that have been respected because they are sacred. These areas, including some in Casamance (Senegal), are currently being studied for UNESCO. Eugène Faty, who lives in Casamance, observed the sacred Oussouye forest south of Dakar, which no one is allowed to enter, on UNESCO's behalf. The fruits that grow on its trees are untouchable. They fall to the ground, where their seeds give rise to dense undergrowth. Trees and animals are strictly protected, and may be removed only during initiation ceremonies which take place every twenty or twenty-five years. If a tree must be cut down or an animal killed, its forgiveness must be asked first. The same tradition used to be found among the hunters of Parakou and Savé, in northern Benin. The hunters were also healers who maintained a close relationship with plants and animals, from which they made medicines. Not everyone had the right to kill a lion or buffalo. Before and after the hunt, the privileged hunters had to offer sacrifices which cost them very dear, thus naturally limiting the quantity of quarry they could take.

READING NATURE'S OPEN BOOK

Although European settlement has profoundly altered the quality of life of Australia's Aborigines, nature is still an open book to them. With neither watches nor calendars, they tell the times and seasons by the blossoming of plants and trees. When the milky-white "oyster flowers" are in bloom, real oysters are plump, white and ready for gathering, and when the pink heather in Darwin, Northern Territory, blossoms, it means honey is plentiful. Food is closely related to religion. People, the earth, animals and plants all belong within a vast system of laws created by the ancestral spirits during the "dream-time". The honey ants of Papunya, in the centre of the country, are a beneficent reincarnation of these spirits because they provide the Aborigines with the sweetmeats they relish. Some foods become totems and may sometimes be eaten during ceremonies, which helps regulate both hunting and gathering. Custom requires the Tiwis of Bathurst Island, not far from Darwin, always to rebury a piece of a yam to make sure the tuber grows back right away.

Shark fishing off the Tonga Islands is a ritual activity, remote from any concern for catch size or profit, and does not deplete the sea's abundant resources. "Throughout the Pacific," writes Marie-Claire Bataille-Benguigui of the French National Museum of Natural History, "the shark is a revered or even sacred creature. It is, depending on the place, the incarnation of either gods or ancestors". In the Tonga Islands, the shark is considered to be a love-token from the deity Hina, a female figure observed on the moon, to the world of human beings. Harpooned or caught with fish nets or slip-knots, the sharks are shared out, but they cannot be sold and the pieces cannot leave the village. Traditional fishing methods are, however, being replaced by more efficient, environmentally threatening techniques.

The small kingdom of Bhutan, northeast of India, is another place where religious beliefs help protect the environment. A specialist who lived there for ten years says the people of Bhutan, steeped in Buddhist philosophy, have a profound respect for rivers and for mountains, some of which it is forbidden to climb. Species that have become extremely rare, such as the snow leopard and the Himalayan black bear, live in peace in Bhutan because animals there are never killed for sport. When black-necked cranes migrate from Siberia or northern Tibet to spend the winter, landing in the fields in large flocks, the local people, who respect the birds, consider it an excellent omen.

On the other hand, the forest has not been spared. The cutting of wood for fuel and the clearing of forests for agriculture have seriously jeopardized the ecological balance. The government has launched an $8.9 million programme to set up extensive forest reserves and encourage farmers to plant trees around their property because wood supplies 98 per cent of their energy needs. A World Bank report indicates that overexploitation of the forest does not seem to have alerted the local population, which, moreover, is increasing at a rapid rate.

It is hard to believe that the bare, eroded, arid lands of Cochabamba in central Bolivia supported a lush tropical forest as recently as the nineteenth century. Who was responsible for this act of destruction? Trees played a major part in Inca mythology. Michel Schlaifer, a specialist in forestry who has been working in Cochabamba for three years, has written that the Incas regarded the roots of trees as a link with the ancestors in the world "below", the trunk as representing the "present" world, and the branches as symbolizing the relationship with the gods in the world "above". In his *History of the New World*, published in 1653, the Spanish historian Bernabé Cobo observed that a Spanish household burned more wood in a day than an Indian household burned in a month. The Spanish cooked several times a day whereas the Indians prepared all their food for the day in one go. The Indians built their dwellings of rammed earth, while the Spanish settlers used wood for house frames, furniture and doors.

An initiation in the forest of Kalounaye (Senegal).

A Lacandón fisherman at Bonampak in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Mexico).

In addition, wooden pit-props and other structural supports were needed for the many mines. Later, when the railways came, wood was indispensable as fuel. No-one made any attempt to plant new trees.

THE ROLE OF THE SACRED

Colonization brought with it the system of cash crops and quick profits, but it was not the only factor that upset the balance between man and nature. Some specialists argue that the New Zealand *moa* (or dinorcis), a giant bird that was unable to fly and was an easy prey for Polynesian hunters, became extinct because it was not protected by a taboo. Research in this field is continuing in New Caledonia, where similar reasons may explain the disappearance of the macrofauna.

According to the Zairian sociologist Simon Mukuna, many activities by indigenous peoples are wrongly attributed to a desire to protect the environment. The Baoulé of Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, respect the trees on their sacred mountain because the spirits of the dead live there and harmony must be preserved between them and the spirits of the forest. Is it possible that the sacralization of nature is the best way to protect it? In the summer 1992 issue of *Diogenes*, the quarterly journal of the International Council of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (no. 159, pp. 58-60), the Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro writes of Aztec civilization as follows: "Time and space were determined in terms of the sacred; the sacred pervaded their institutions, their daily lives, their artistic creations, and formed the basis of all their beliefs. . . . The gods are a tangible presence in all things: in trees, rivers, mountains, time and space, and in the daily activities of men. . . . The desacralization of nature and of society began with transcendental monotheism. The alienation of the sacred was accentuated in the Renaissance. Nature began to be seen not as the impression and sign of divinity, but as a manipulable object, destined to be dominated and moulded by man".

In Ghana forests have been preserved because they are regarded as sacred. UNESCO has launched a three-year project entitled the "Co-operative Integrated Project on Savanna Ecosystems in Ghana", which will study carefully preserved sacred forests with the help of fetishists, village communities, farmers, women and local authorities. The aim is to reconstitute in the surrounding area the flora that is best-adapted to the climate and soil. This is a good example of how the knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples are being positively reassessed during the International Year devoted to them. ■

FRANCE BEQUETTE
is a Franco-American journalist specializing in environmental questions. Since 1985 she has been associated with the WANAD-UNESCO training programme for African news-agency journalists.

Prayer-flags in Bhutan.

CLEANING UP THE BLACK SEA

Each day, five major rivers (the Danube, the Dniepr, the Dniestr, the Don and the Koban) pour pollution generated by 165 million inhabitants of 17 countries into the Black Sea. Waste water from cities, agricultural pesticides and fertilizers, industrial discharges and oil poured from ships have already caused serious damage. Algae proliferating in the polluted water have killed marine life and ruined the once flourishing fishing industry. Catches have plummeted from 900,000 tons in 1986 to 100,000 tons in 1992. Swimming has been banned on many beaches, reducing revenue from tourism. The six Black Sea countries—Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine—have decided to launch a three-year, $30-million project with the help of the Global Environment Fund, to restore the sea's ecological balance. The task will be divided among the six countries, with Romania, for example, working on the fishing industry, Georgia on biological diversity and Bulgaria on the emergency measures to be taken if disaster strikes. ■

OIL-SNIFFING DOGS

A Canadian company, Imperial Oil Resources Limited, is using dogs to sniff out underground oil, natural gas and chemical pipeline leaks. Labrador retrievers, which are also used to detect drugs and as guide-dogs for the blind, can locate leaks from pipes buried as deep as five metres underground. When a pipeline springs a leak, a foul-smelling chemical is pumped into the suspected section. This substance, which was specially developed for the Canadian company, is what the dogs actually detect. Imperial Oil's Ron Quaife says that, in 136 leaks so far, the dogs have failed only twice, and have saved pipeline owners millions of dollars. ■

WHEN PROSPERITY INCREASES POLLUTION

Summer and winter smog is posing a serious health hazard in many cities of central and eastern Europe. During winter smog episodes in Krakow (Poland), for example, patients afflicted with respiratory diseases are taken for the night to the Wieliczka salt mine to find temporary relief. Industrially generated fogs, which have largely disappeared from western Europe, are increasing in eastern Europe, where the number of cars is doubling every seven years. Bratislava (Slovakia), Budapest (Hungary) and Prague (Czech Republic) are particularly affected. Winter smog is caused by a mixture of primary pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide, suspended particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide. Summer smog is caused by ozone, a secondary pollutant produced by complex chemical reactions between primary pollutants and sunlight. A major contribution to it is made by exhaust emissions, particularly from cars not equipped with catalytic converters.

TREES ATTACKED BY KILLER MIST

Trees along several of the world's coastlines, including the French Mediterranean littoral and the Italian coast near the mouth of the Arno in Tuscany, are turning yellow and withering. In 1992 the French Agronomic Research Institute (INRA) launched a programme which led to the conclusion that detergents and hydrocarbons on the surface of the water become concentrated in sea mist. These pollutants are then carried by the wind to the shore, where they attack leaves and pine needles, damaging the surfaces so that salt can penetrate. The growth of urban settlements along the coastline and the increase in shipping will make it increasingly difficult to solve this problem. ■

UNDERSTANDING RIO

A Geneva-based foundation, the Centre for Our Common Future, has published a remarkable little book entitled *The Earth Summit's Agenda for Change. A plain-language version of Agenda 21 and the other Rio agreements.* The book, written by Michael Keating, is divided into four sections: the social and economic dimensions of Agenda 21; resource conservation and management; strengthening the role of major groups; and the means of implementation of sustainable development. Each part is broken down into a number of one- or two-page sections illustrated with tables and graphs of great clarity. In addition to the English version there are also versions in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian. For further details please write to the The Centre for Our Common Future, 52 rue des Pâquis, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland. Tel: (41 22) 732 71 17. Fax: 738 50 46. ■

THE WORLD'S COLDEST CASSAVA

Cassava is a tuber that feeds approximately 800 million people, or one person in every seven. The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Cali, Colombia, has frozen cassava shoot tips by plunging them into liquid nitrogen at -196° C, stopping the plants' cell functions and making it possible to preserve them indefinitely. Rigoberto Hidalgo, a researcher at the Center, says, "Genetic diversity cannot be recreated after it disappears, so gene banks are the basis for tomorrow's food supply." In 1991 CIAT froze plant parts in liquid nitrogen, recovered them and made them grow again into whole plants. The Center is already planning to extend the process, which so far has been used only to preserve cassava, to other tropical species such as potatoes, sweet potatoes and bananas. ■

PROTECTING THE BIJAGOS ARCHIPELAGO

The Bijagos archipelago is part of the west African country of Guinea-Bissau, which is wedged between Senegal and Guinea. Now part of the *Archipel* Is!and and Coastal Biosphere Reserves Network, which is integrated into UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme, the island chain comprises some 80 islands and stretches over 900 square kilometres. Social and cultural anthropologists as well as ornithologists are very interested in the archipelago, whose environment is still well preserved, although new buildings for the tourist industry are starting to appear along the coasts. As a result, the government and a number of national and international organizations have decided to promote the establishment of a national park and a biosphere reserve. The project is accompanied by an awareness-raising and information campaign, training programmes for local people, and a coastal planning project that has already resulted in several land-use maps for Guinea-Bissau and the Bijagos archipelago. ■

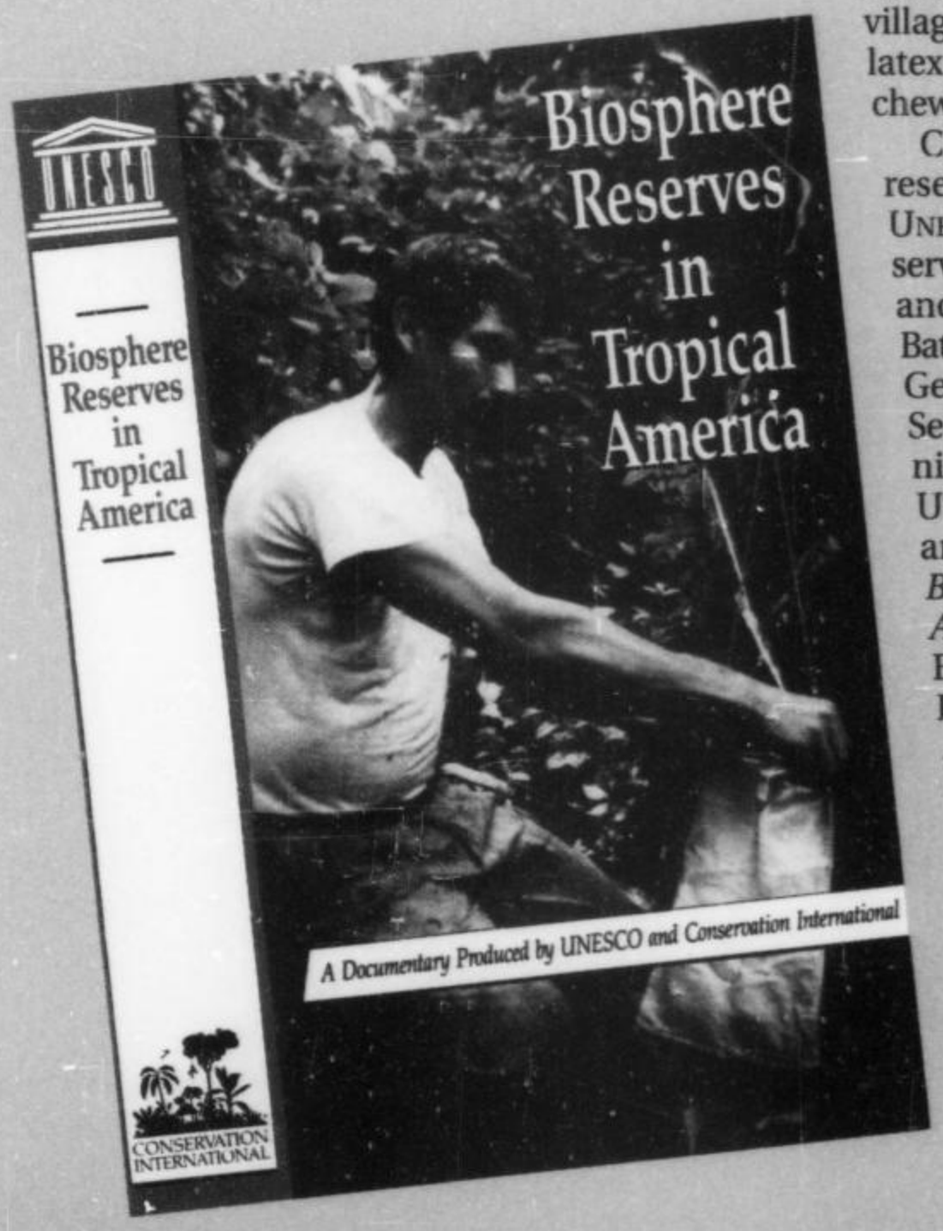
CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

Six years ago Conservation International (CI), an American non-governmental organization, began breaking new ground in the field of environmental protection. In 1987 the group organized the first debt-for-nature swap by purchasing part of Bolivia's external debt on the international market. CI raised funds that helped the South American country's government create a "biosphere reserve" comprising 1.5 million hectares of the Beni humid tropical forest in the middle of the country.

A project aimed at breaking down the political borders between ecosystems by defining transnational "bioregions" is even more far-reaching. Costa Rica and Panama, for example, signed an agreement setting up the binational La Amistad Biosphere Reserve, and in 1991 CI brought together representatives of Guatemala, Mexico and Belize to define the boundaries of a tropical rain forest corresponding to those of the ancient Mayan empire. In Guatemala 25,000 square kilometres have become the Maya Biosphere Reserve, which is complemented by other reserves in the neighbouring countries.

Large-scale projects currently under way in seventeen countries have made CI famous. They are accompanied by a host of related activities. For example, teams of CI experts are assessing the diversity of plant and animal species in remote areas of the Amazon forest and Papua New Guinea. CI has also developed a geographic information system to pinpoint environmental hotspots where protection and management are top priorities. It is encouraging young people in Costa Rica and Suriname to study the medicinal properties of local plants with village shamans, ensuring that their knowledge is passed on to future generations. At the same time it is promoting sustainable use of the forests' myriad non-timber products, such as the tagua palm nut, which looks and feels like ivory, decorative plants, spices, waxes and resins. In Guatemala, for example, villagers harvest chicle, a natural latex used in the manufacture of chewing gum.

CI has adopted the "biosphere reserve" concept defined by UNESCO, combining nature conservation with local development and scientific research. Michel Batisse, former Assistant Director-General with UNESCO's Science Sector, is a member of the organization's Board of Directors. UNESCO and CI have produced an educational film entitled *Biosphere Reserves in Tropical America*, which is available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. ■



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Intellectuals: the missing link?

An Indian journalist and a South African novelist (page 36) reflect on the responsibilities of intellectuals today and tomorrow and issue a warning against the temptations of utopianism that deluded so many of their predecessors.

Asking the right questions

■ by Dileep Padgaonkar ■

HAVE we become obsolete? We failed to foresee the chaos, anarchy and violence that have been wreaking havoc in many parts of the world during the last few years. We were not prepared, mentally and emotionally, for the implosion of the Soviet Union, the upsurge of ethnic, nationalist and religious hatreds in Europe, Africa and Asia, the sight of people too emaciated or terrorized to express a single coherent thought or voice a single coherent sentiment.

We do not know what questions to ask. The grandiose interrogations that world views, holistic approaches and ideologies prompted until only the other day now invite ridicule, scorn and, what is worse, apathy and indifference. Our vocation is to connect individuals and events, events and trends, trends and processes, signs and fantasies. We are not able to do so. And it is this inability which provokes us more and more to speak about the uncontrollable forces now taking hold of our minds in terms which are either apocalyptic or embarrasingly autobiographical. No longer can we echo Malraux:

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"There is more truth in the ink of scholars than in the blood of martyrs", mixed media on canvas (89 x 116 cm) by the Moroccan painter Hamid.

eralized answers. But we can no longer avoid them. Whether we were conservatives, liberals or Marxists, our notion of progress tended to be linear and measurable. Progress meant "marching ahead" on the strength of capital, technology, management, marketing and, depending on where we placed ourselves on the ideological spectrum, on the distribution of incomes and assets and the creation of cultural artefacts and services.

We assumed that material wellbeing, civic order and cultural give-and-take were goals shared by humanity everywhere and that the obstacles in the way of reaching these goals were class interest, mercantile aggrandisement or the never-satiated appetite for influence and power of certain nations or groups of nations. This is why our moral categories were biased in favour of individual freedoms and egalitarianism. This is why we reposed our faith in reason and rationality. This is why we assumed that economic advancement, social justice, higher standards of education, culture and health, equality before the law and such other elements of a democratic order would forever banish the demons of prejudice, hate and bigotry.

Messianic creeds and millenarian fantasies

We were wrong. In retrospect we made no allowance for several factors which have now come to play a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of individuals, communities and nations. We did not pay enough attention for instance to the fact that in two crucial areas of our life—the economy and information—the centres of decision-making would no longer be local or national bureaucracies but more and more transnational oligarchies of bankers, speculators and myth-makers in the media. In these two areas the sovereignty enjoyed by national governments is being eroded day by day in the name of the free market, the interdependence of economies, the free flow of ideas and images.

Nor did we adequately appreciate the extent to which rising expectations for a better life—measured almost entirely in terms of higher levels of consumption—would inevitably engender frustration, which in turn would lead to the atomization of individuals, the destabilization of societies and the progressive entropy of institutions whose role is to protect life and property, dispense justice, temper greed and avarice. When individuals, societies and the various bodies of governance are thus rendered rudderless, messianic creeds and millenarian fantasies step in to promise a socially stable, spiritually sound and materially prosperous future. In the period after the end of the Second World War these creeds and fantasies, which derive their sustenance from references to a glorious

Qu'importe ce qui n'importe qu'à moi? (What does anything matter that matters to me alone?)

This sense of our own obsolescence must lead us, inevitably, to question the assumptions we made, the logic we followed and the goals we set for ourselves during our intellectual itinerary. These are admittedly large questions which can at best yield tentative, vague and extremely gen-

past, a past free of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious "impurities", were fringe phenomena. Now in the North and South alike they threaten to come centre-stage. They frown on reason, suspect objectivity, decry tolerance, despise the secular outlook and debunk modernity.

Make no mistake about it. To people who are afraid of chaos and deprivation, this appeal to return to "fundamentals" of religious faith has a powerful emotional and moral appeal which is all the stronger because the rational and secular discourse has proved again and again to be a case of hopes unfulfilled, a case of double-speak and double-think, of hypocrisy and arrogance. That those who advocate a return to "fundamentals" and to various "cleansing" operations have no morally viable alternatives to offer is another story altogether. But few are willing to even consider listening to such a story right now.

Lost certainties

The India I come from is no longer the India of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. This was the India in which I was born and where I grew up. When these two men held India in thrall every Indian had an enticing challenge to shoulder: to gradually minimize the importance of, if not altogether shed, the "givens" of his birth—his religion, his caste, his linguistic and provincial affinities—the better to assume his larger identity as a citizen of a vast multi-religious and multi-cultural nation. This, in turn, would enable him to be at peace with himself and with the world at large.

Our articles of faith were democracy, secularism, democratic socialism, non-alignment. We took pride in the fact that we were an old civilization but a young nation; that our people were poor and largely illiterate but yet held in their hands the power to make and unmake governments; that our press was free; that though our country was partitioned on religious lines in 1947 we refused to tread the path of theocracy; that Hinduism, which owed its genius to its eclectic and pluralistic nature, would ensure that our democracy would avoid the pitfalls of majoritarianism; that our system would steer clear of the excesses of capitalism and communism alike, and that we would build a modern India on the foundations of a civilization which has given mankind some of its shrewdest philosophical insights and some of its most sublime aesthetic experiences.

Today, money power and muscle power have often replaced arguments about electoral programmes. Corruption is all-pervasive. People have little faith in the fairness and efficiency of the administration and the courts. Our secularism too has come under a cloud because religion is being blatantly exploited for electoral gain. The minorities are being told to reject all reform on the ground that it would endanger their identity. The majority is being persuaded that the "appeasement" of the minorities has gone far enough. The secularists are clearly on the defensive.

***Panic* (1987), gouache on paper (57 x 82 cm) by the Tunisian painter Gouider Triki.**

The collapse of the Soviet Union has if anything precipitated the fall of the two remaining pillars of Nehruvian India: socialism and non-alignment. Interdependence in the economic sphere has led purely and simply to obeying the dictates of international financial institutions and the transnationals regardless of the costs to social justice and to sovereign decision-making. As for non-alignment, there is no-one left to be non-aligned against. The emerging world order is nothing if not "pragmatic", that is, one where the currency of power is economic clout, military (preferably atomic) might and political and social "order".

Unwilling to participate in the media carnivals, unable to succumb to the seductions of the marketeers, profoundly sceptical of fundamentalisms, reduced to the role of a helpless spectator of nations losing their sovereignty and of societies redefining their identities on the aggressive agenda of separateness, the intellectual appears to have reached two debilitating conclusions. First, that the North-South dichotomy is not a geographical or even civilizational expression, but that it is very much present in the minds of individuals everywhere. Second, that for the present at least this dichotomy cannot be overcome because, in the truest sense, it is rooted in the quest for power at one end and in the quest for self-fulfilment at the other. The discourse of the International Monetary Fund and the Pentagon, and of their surrogates elsewhere in the world, shapes the former quest while the discourse of the clergyman shapes the latter. Nations may come together or fall apart but in both cases people are called upon to worship at the altar of Mammon and to converse with the Almighty, either directly, if possible, or through His intermediaries on earth if necessary.

Striking a balance

The cashier, the communicator, the clergyman rule the roost: none of them has any use for elaborate conceptual systems, logic or the reason of the sort dear to the Enlightenment philosophers. The cashier, communicator and clergyman entertain no doubt; their sole concern is how best to market their certainties. The certainty of the cashier is ever more cash; that of the communicator, ever more slick messages; that of the clergyman, ever greater simplification of the agonies that torment the soul. In plain words, the intellectual, to be effective, cannot be content to discredit cash, subvert the slick message and expose the chilling banalities of fundamentalist speech, but must propose solutions which do not emanate either from a cockily self-confident ideology or from its counterfeit, religiosity.

This is of course easier said than done.

Perhaps a beginning can be made if intellectuals learn to strike a balance between the imperatives of economic progress brought about by science and technology and efficient management of men and resources, concern for human rights, the protection of the environment, and affirmation of cultural identity without aggressivity or apologia. Perhaps a constant preoccupation with the spiritual and moral yearnings of individuals everywhere is required. Emphasizing one of these imperatives at the expense of the others may well be the reason why the world appears to have gone out of gear. ■

Participants at the first Meeting of Intellectuals and Creators for a Single World

Tariq Banuri *(Pakistan)*,
Tahar Ben Jelloun *(Morocco)*,
Jacques Berque *(France)*,
Daniel J. Boorstin *(United States)*,
André Brink *(South Africa)*,
Lester Brown *(United States)*,
Fawzia Charfi *(Tunisia)*,
Mustafa Chérif *(Algeria)*,
Jean Daniel *(Le Nouvel Observateur)*,
Régis Debray *(France)*,
Amos Elon *(Israel)*,
Luc Ferry *(France)*,
Celso Furtado *(Brazil)*,
Nathan Gardels *(Los Angeles Times Syndicate)*,
Susan George *(United States)*,
Bernard Guetta *(France)*,
Mahmoud Hussein *(UNESCO Courier)*,
Joseph Ki-Zerbo *(Burkina Faso)*,
Jean Lacouture *(France)*,
Gilles Lapouge *(O Estado de São Paulo)*,
Flora Lewis *(United States)*,
Antonin Liehm *(Czech Republic)*,
Pavel Lounguine *(Russia)*,
Adam Michnik *(Poland)*,
Edgar Morin *(France)*,
Sami Naïr *(France)*,
Ehsan Naraghi *(Iran)*,
Olesegun Obasango *(Nigeria)*,
Erik Orsenna *(France)*,
Dileep Padgaonkar *(India)*,
Stanley Sheinbaum *(United States)*,
Oliver Stone *(United States)*,
Alain Touraine *(France)*,
Immanuel Wallerstein *(United States)*.

Assuming responsibility

by André Brink

FIRST of all we must be clear about what we mean by the words "progress", "North" and "South". ("North" of what? "South" of what? The problem of positioning becomes crucial here; and the suggestion of tidy objectivity—north and south of an immovable neutral equator—has fallen into disrepute since Copernicus).

Progress is a combination of motion and direction, from one point to another. Before anything else, we should clear our vocabulary to make sure North and South agree on starting points and (temporary) goals. All too often in the past the starting point has been implied to be wherever the South finds itself at a given moment; and the goal the position occupied by the North. At the very least, it seems to me that the guideline should be what Camus said about freedom and justice: accepting that neither is attainable in an absolute form, at least one knows that in *any* situation it is possible to aspire to *more* freedom and *more* justice.

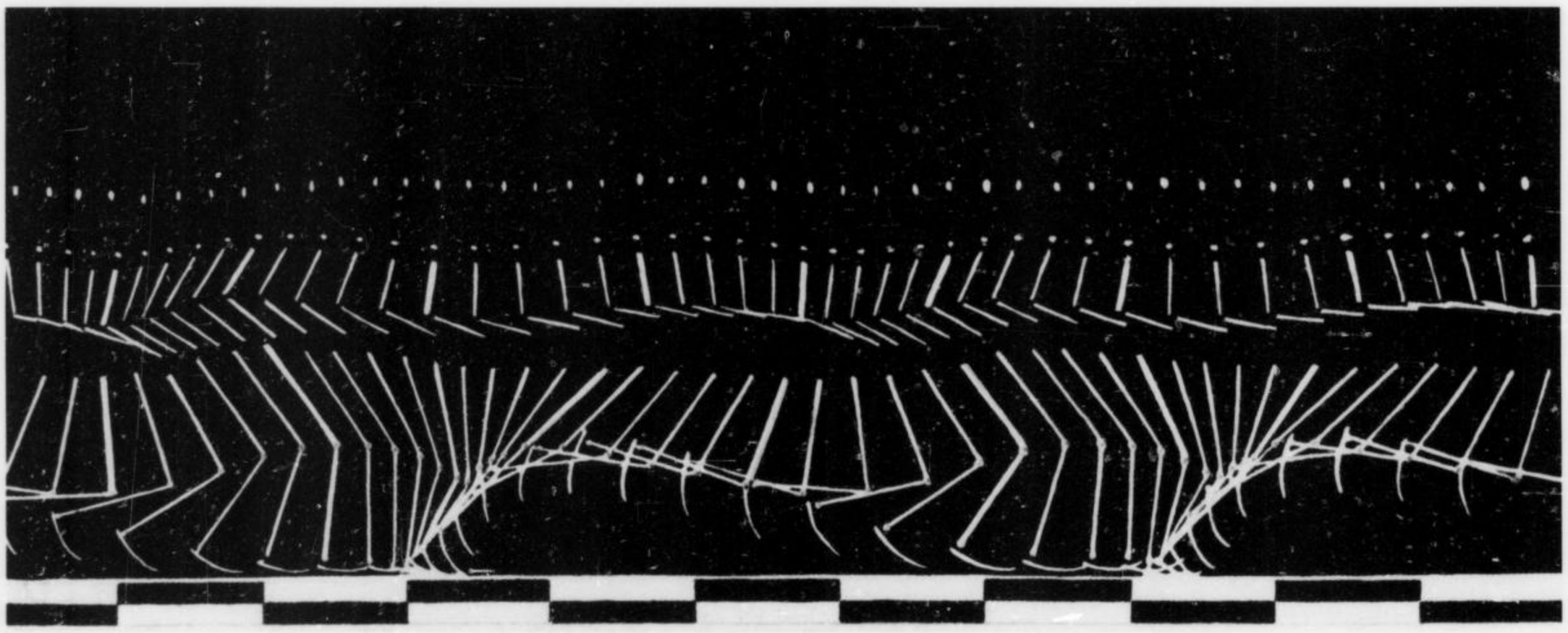
What sort of progress?

But having clarified the principle, we still need to define the context of the progress we have in mind. Are we talking about technology, economics, social behaviour, judicial systems, or politics? Again, the vantage point would determine everything. It is easy to predict which position will be assumed by those in the North who interpret the collapse of Marxism as, *ipso facto*, the vindication of capitalism. And the very notion of "universalism" is suspect from the moment the question of "whose universalism?" is posed.

Are we talking about aesthetic progress? If we are, then surely the great Northern (here identical with Western) tradition of symmetries and masterpieces, of the pursuit of excellence, of the beautiful, of the whole, appears to serve, if not as a consummation devoutly to be wished, then at least as a time-honoured and thoroughly proven point of departure. But the South African experience places it under a question mark, if not under threat of erasure. How "valid" is a tradition that originated in ancient Greece among those individuals who had the leisure to indulge in aesthetics because they had enough slaves to take care of their manual work?

This dangerous division between "higher" and "menial" pursuits is itself open to question. (And yet it has "validity"! Who would be so rash as to discard all its products, from Homer and Sophocles via Chaucer and Ronsard and Michelangelo and Shakespeare and Rembrandt and Mozart and Tolstoy and countless others?) The point is that the moment "validity" enters into the discussion it invites, once again, the question, "Validity for whom?", which subverts all aspirations towards the objective and the universal. It is so easy for such matters to be

***Running Man*, a "geometric" photographic sequence produced in 1886 by the French scientist and photographer Etienne Jules Marey.**



***Dawn*,**
a detail from the tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici sculpted by Michelangelo in about 1521.

drawn into the games of power that preoccupy our world. And of one thing I am sure—I hope!—and that is that when we speak of progress it is not progress in increasing the efficiencies of power we have in mind. (The opposite may be closer to our intentions: the curtailment of power; the minimizing of power in order to maximize freedom and justice and the pursuit of truth.)

As a writer, my concern would primarily be with progress of a cultural kind, or within a cultural context; and for the purposes of specification I would focus on those impulses of culture involved in the *production of meaning and the definition of morality, of ethical responsibility*. Assuming once again, with Camus, the absence of objective or absolute value systems, certainly, in respect both of significance and of morality, it would be possible to strive for an increase, and an enhancement, in any given context, social or otherwise.

Surely, actions, projects or products can constantly be improved in terms of their "load" of meaning or their moral "validity" to or for an increasing number of individuals (and in their impact on each individual). The problem of a defining instance may appear to remain: who "decides" on what will make a given cultural achievement more morally acceptable, or more significant? And once again the danger of an imposition of criteria from outside or above is only too real. (But perhaps "value" may precisely be

determined in terms of the dangers to be faced in the process, the risks to be taken, the odds to be surmounted, the boundaries to be transcended.) To me, the advantage of such a view lies in the way it minimizes the opportunities for such an imposition, as each individual would be encouraged to evaluate her or his own experience (cultural or otherwise). And surely this would be an ideal ingredient of true democracy. It makes the individual experience the starting point of cultural progress: yet that experience remains at all times fully inserted within social interchange and collective responsibility.

Obviously this goes far beyond, but need not exclude, the conceptions of culture presently encountered in much of the world: culture as the "organization of leisure" in the North; culture as combat and "conscientization" in the South.

That dangerous animal, the intellectual

We know that, at least since Julien Benda's *La Trahison des clercs*, the term "intellectual" is itself at risk. We know Camus's warning that "The intellectual is a dangerous animal that easily commits treason." But who still conceives of that species as the lonely, aloof, disinterested creature who judges human events, in an ivory tower of dispassionate sanity, in terms of a transcendental Good or Evil? We know that the much-vaunted "free agent" of the Age of Reason is a fiction: we are all subject to the tussle and play of ideologies, even when we least suspect it; and at least we have learned this much from Marxism, that we accept our involvement—even our implication—in our social context and in history.

But this does not remove our responsibility.

This, to me, is the key to the intellectual's role, both within the general processes of change in which all individuals and societies are engaged, and in the specific convulsions of transition our world is experiencing in this particular *fin de siècle:* that of responsibility. Responsibility to the individual conscience as much as to the social collective; responsibility to history (that is, not only to the present, but to past and future); responsibility towards those values which guarantee the compass of our humanity: freedom, truth, justice. And it also means a responsibility *against* whatever threatens to diminish that humanity, which would include a responsibility against ideology, against dogma. The intellectual, today, is no longer only the one who says, "*J'accuse!*", but the one who affirms, "*J'assume ma responsabilité*".

At the very least this assumption of responsibility by the intellectual towards the processes of progress would imply the elimination (in oneself; in one's society) of mentalities and attitudes resulting from our adherence, for too long, to the divisions of Empire and Barbarians, West and East, North and South: in the North, the belief in superiority and in centrism; in the South, the victim mentality, which makes it too easy always to blame others for all predicaments and problems. Once again, both these attitudes are demonstrated quite spectacularly in South Africa today; but once again the virtue of this demonstration is its applicability to most of the world's societies, in one form or another—ranging from ethnic jokes to genocide.

The lure of power

In the exercise of this responsibility the greatest danger is, once again, the lure of power. In the old South Africa, the white minority dictated its master narratives and used its control of the media and the means of cultural production to help maintain its political control. There are signs, in the transitional South Africa, of cultural commissars trying to impose *their* ideological position (curiously and anachronistically Stalinist in many respects) on others in order to turn the tables on the "opposition". Even if it is not hard to understand the justification of such a *démarche,* it goes without saying that this simply perpetuates the principle of binarity which was the undoing of the ancien regime.

The intellectual—notably the intellectual in her or his manifestation as writer—should clearly distinguish between two separate possible roles to be played: first, *as* writer, in which the act of creating itself predominates, with its emphasis on individual experience and the individual conscience, the individual responsibility towards excellence (this is the context within which Marquez characterized the writer as revolutionary in terms of "writing as well as he can"); second, as "*vedette*", which is the *consequence* of the first. (As a *result* of writing well—whatever that is perceived to be in a given situation—she or he acquires notoriety, which can be used as a base for influencing the cultural/social/political debate.) It is imperative to distinguish between the two.

The first role holds only the danger of withdrawal; but that, it seems to me, is a danger society has to accept as a given; it is the price to be paid for the possibility (never the guarantee) of cultural quality. For it is simply not possible to "program" writing—or any cultural activity for that matter; the whole value of the individual in society is vested in this. And in South Africa it is significant that, after decades of "struggle literature" (much of it, I should point out, remarkably good by any standards) the African National Congress itself is turning more

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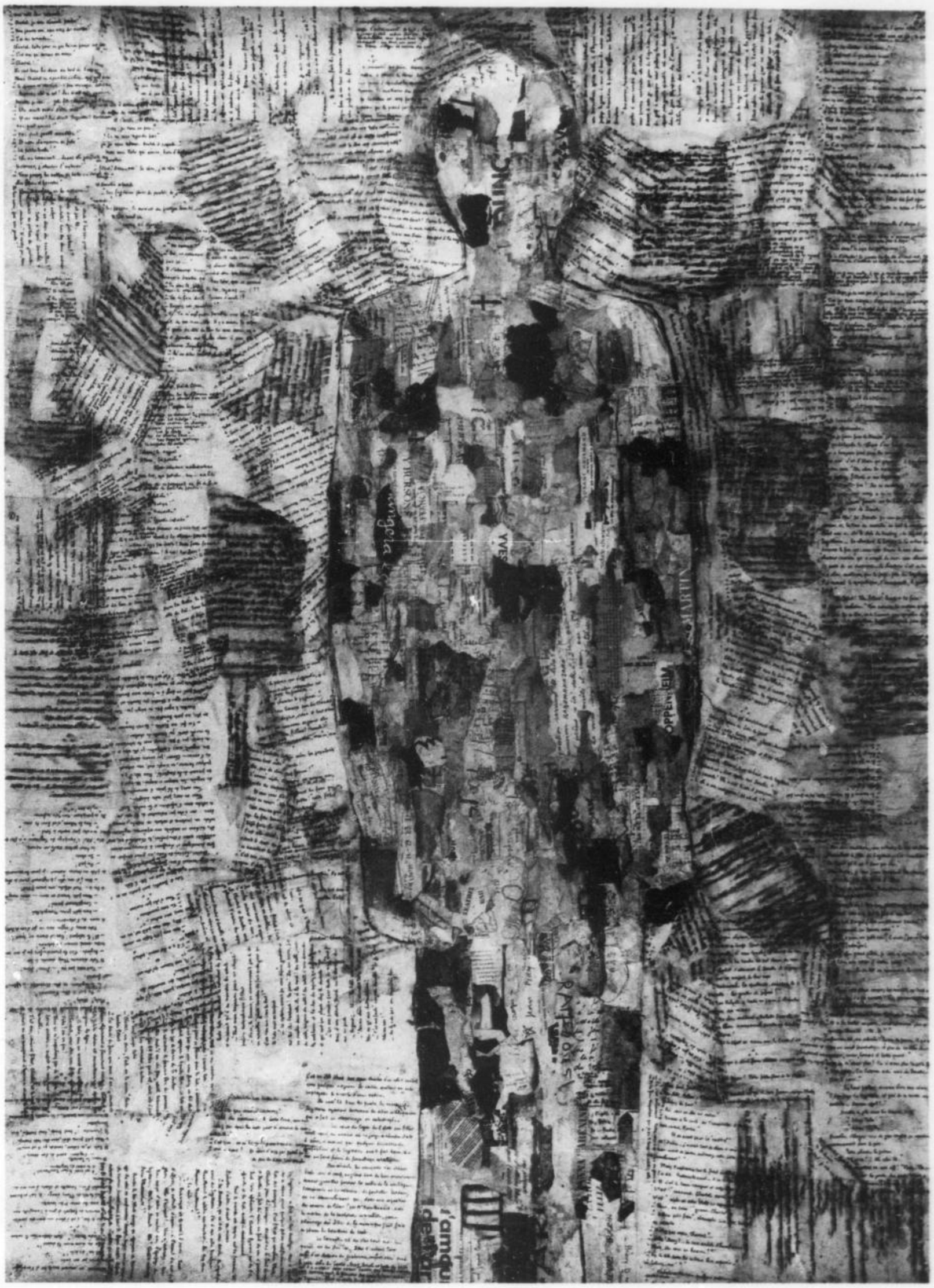


Untitled collage (1992, 160 x 120 cm) by the French artist Pascal Lièvre.

and more towards this aspect of individual unpredictability and responsibility in cultural activity.

The second function of the writer—as "cultural worker"—holds the real danger of involvement in power strategies. It cannot be shirked, and it cannot be denied. The nature of our media-informed world is such that tremendous potential power is lodged within this function. For that very reason, once again, one's basic appeal is to responsibility—in respect of each of the social and moral forces I have outlined earlier.

Ultimately, then, the differences we impose on our categorization of North and South are both confirmed and transcended within the processes of cultural progress. Through the creative exploration of our different situations we affirm our common humanity; through our dedication to mutual excellence, we foster a mutual respect; through our involvement in humanity we create space for the individual; through our assumption of responsibility we allow each other to assume our full worth as members of the human family. Progress is the same for all, and never the same; it demands awareness of difference and diversity as a starting point, yet it never fails to affirm that as women and men of South and North we are all as weak as the weakest among us, as strong as the strongest. I am, we are; we are, I am. ■

UNESCO IN ACTION
NEWSBRIEFS

NEW MEMBER STATES
The number of UNESCO Member States now stands at 181 (as of 28 October 1993). Recent signatories of the Organization's Constitution include Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Tajikistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Eritrea, the Solomon Islands, Andorra, Uzbekistan and the Pacific island state of Niue.

SCHOOLS FOR ONE WORLD
UNESCO's Associated Schools Project (ASP), which now encompasses more than 2,900 establishments in 116 countries, celebrated its 40th anniversary on 12 September 1993. A major international network, ASP seeks through student exchange programmes, teacher training, publications, audiovisual materials and other initiatives to create citizens conscious of their responsibilities as members of the world community. In the past ten years it has concentrated on four main areas: world problems and the role of the United Nations system in solving them; human rights; intercultural learning; and concern for the environment.

THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE BOOK
Over 200 political leaders and distinguished religious, scientific and cultural personalities from 72 countries have contributed messages to an "International Peace Book" that was presented at a ceremony held on 12 October at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Nobel Peace Prize laureates Mother Teresa, Rigoberta Menchu and Polish President Lech Walesa, as well as Pope John Paul II and former Senegalese President Leopold Sedar Senghor are among the Book's signatories, who are all committed to the idea that "Peace should no longer be defined by the absence of war and violence. . . . It should become a goal that is voluntarily fixed and continually reformulated." Other contributors to the Book, whose Honorary President is Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, include the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf, the American opera singer Barbara Hendricks, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the late Willy Brandt, and Johan Jorgen Holst, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who played a vital role in the recent Israeli-Palestinian accord.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AND STUDENT CARDS
More than 3 million students and young people under 26 years of age, 60 per cent of them Europeans, carry cards sponsored by the Federation of International Youth Travel Organizations (FIYTO) and the International Student Travel Conference (ISTC) that provide travel discounts and facilitate access to museums and other cultural leisure activities. On 8 October in Vienna, UNESCO signed a memorandum of understanding with the two bodies that is designed to promote a wider use of the cards. The aim is, by making the cards more widely accessible, to strengthen exchanges between young people worldwide.

BIOETHICS COMMITTEE HOLDS ITS FIRST MEETING
The first session of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) was held at UNESCO Headquarters on 15 and 16 September. At the meeting, some 40 leading scientists discussed a report on the human genome prepared by an interdisciplinary task force headed by Noëlle Lenoir, President of the IBC and a member of the French Constitutional Council. The Committee asked its Bureau to study the form and content of a possible international instrument for the protection of the human genome and to write a report on the four topics which it will examine at its second session in 1994: the current state of knowledge in genetics; genetics of populations, development and demography; therapeutic applications of genetic research; and genetic screening and individual genetic testing—element of freedom or source of constraint? ■

COMMENTARY

by Federico Mayor

This article is one of a series in which the Director-General of UNESCO—recently elected for a second term by the Organization's General Conference—sets out his thinking on matters of current concern

'LISTEN FOR THE STIRRINGS OF NEW LIFE'

THE closing years of the twentieth century mark a turning point in history. Fault-lines are appearing in the old world order, and as it breaks up it is as if history were subject to the laws of plate tectonics.

We cannot stand idly by as passive witnesses to the rapid changes whereby our world is adapting to economic, social, and cultural upheavals of unprecedented scale. We have a duty to find new ways of freeing the human race from the threats and fears of this *fin de siècle*.

Of course, all this is nothing new—the world has long known the scourges of poverty and underdevelopment, illiteracy and unequal access to health care, war and genocide, hunger and malnutrition, massive indebtedness, unemployment, lack of equal opportunities for women, the scandal of great wealth alongside dire poverty, the population explosion and strife between communities. I, for one, shall not sing the praises of the 1960s and 1970s. For the vast majority those were dark years in which the voice of human suffering was smothered under the heavy blanket of dictatorship and totalitariansim.

But today we are seeing the hope born of democratic revolution, in the East and in the South, being transformed into anxiety and despair, as reality falls short of expectations, as human aspirations are overwhelmed by the immensity of the problems that lie ahead, as development founders in so many parts of the world; and above all as the quest for happiness meets with failure in the most developed countries, where tried and trusted procedures and mechanisms have ceased to be effective.

We must "invent" the future; we must find imaginative ways of redistributing both work and leisure. We must learn to give of ourselves. We must be prepared to make sacrifices in the search for new strategies. We must find a better way to share our one remaining unspoiled treasure—our future.

In so-called "traditional" societies economic activity was regarded as merely one aspect of a wider existence. It was part of a daily routine conditioned by the rhythms of nature, faith and social relations. Over the centuries the means of production developed or were transformed slowly, in harmony with the seasons and the environment, in concert with myths and customs. Individual initiative formed an integral part of the collective enterprise. Each member of the community was guided in his or her behaviour by an understanding of the common culture and standards of the group.

The first signs of the rapid disruption of this balance appeared in Europe. With advances in science and technology and the advent of industrialized society, a social system and methods of production were developed that led increasingly to the separation of the individual from the community, of culture from nature, of work from leisure. Human beings were themselves fragmented, with the growing specialization of productive labour. By its progressive reduction of human relations to quantifiable factors, the industrial revolution began a standardizing process in which the natural differences between individuals were replaced by a heightened potential for social conflict; in which human beings could be treated as abstractions—added and subtracted, counted and manipulated. In short, spiritual and cultural values no longer played a part in the material world.

No doubt the power and influence wielded over material things by industrialized society derive in part from the logic of this process whereby complex entities are systematically reduced to simpler and simpler elements. Meanwhile, we have lost a world vision, a feeling of respect for our neighbour and a sense of community.

The gulf is not only between nations, but within nations. In the developing countries, in fact, the polarization of society, something virtually unknown in the past, is widening the gap between the incomes of certain privileged classes and those of the rest. And so it is that disparities arise in opportunities for education and participation in the cultural and political life of a country.

THE POET'S MESSAGE

Can we allow ourselves to remain unmoved by the mute confrontation between the worlds of rich and poor? The American philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote of a "culture crisis". But a culture crisis is a social crisis, a crisis of the values on which society is founded. Work is becoming increasingly scarce due to increases in productivity. Unless it is shared it is hard to see how a culture based on industrial activity could fail to be in crisis. Sharing can give new meaning to the idea of development in industrial societies, by endowing it with an educating and civilizing function to replace the rigid concept of the three stages of life: youth, a time to learn; maturity, a time to produce; old age, a time to rest and await death. Tomorrow's culture must enrich all life's activities, at every stage of life's journey.

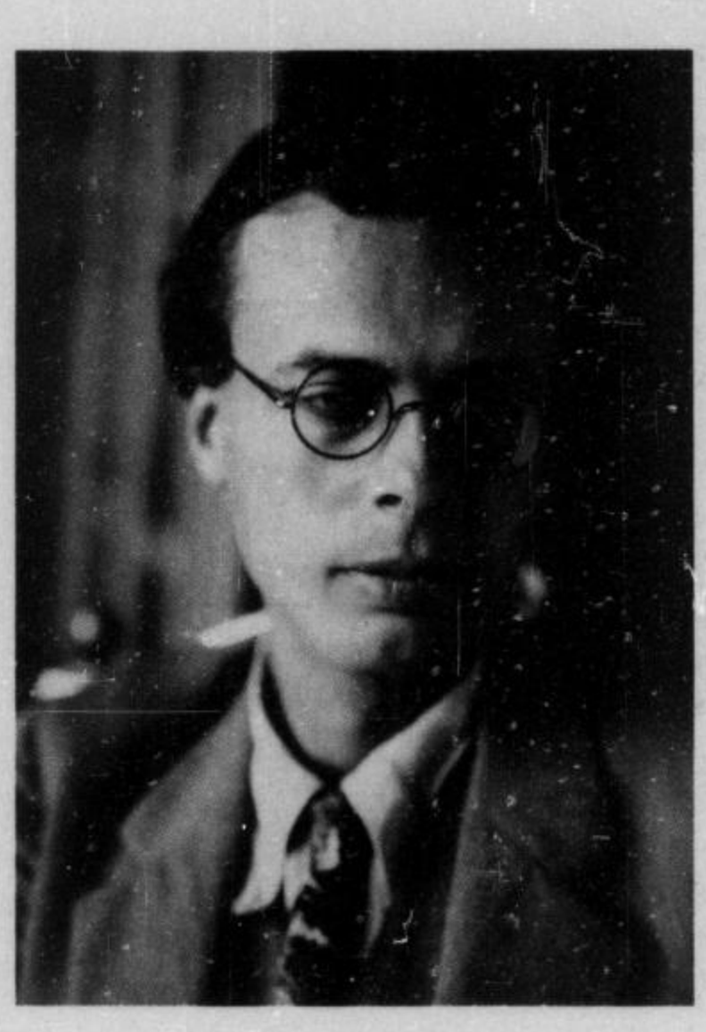
In affluent societies the sense of life's possibilities has been lost and must be found again. But how are we to grapple with the misery confronting the poor countries of the world, in which the gulf between rich and poor is even wider, even more unbridgeable, where extreme poverty can block all hope of access to stability in working life and to fulfilment as a human being? In these countries access to forms of culture that depend on investment in science, technology and education is usually out of the question.

Yunus Emre, the great Turkish poet of Anatolia, whose 750th anniversary we celebrated last year, once wrote: "Our only enemy is hostility itself. We bear a grudge against no-one. For us humankind is indivisible." Across the centuries, it was a man of science, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was to respond to the poet's message of universality through a lesson in diversity which he gave in a famous study prepared for UNESCO, *Race and History*: "It is diversity itself which must be saved," he wrote, "not the outward and visible form in which each period has clothed that diversity, and which can never be preserved beyond the period which gave it birth. We must therefore listen for the stirrings of new life, foster latent potentialities, and encourage every natural inclination for collaboration which the future history of the world may hold. . . . Tolerance is a dynamic attitude, consisting in the anticipation, understanding and promotion of what is struggling into being. We can see the diversity of human cultures behind us, around us and before us."

It is by grasping the two handles—universality and diversity—that make up the uniqueness of culture that we may remain faithful to the message of the poet and the logic of the scientist.

A defence of the intellect
by Aldous Huxley

The International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, UNESCO's forerunner, held a meeting on "the future of the European mind" in Paris from 16-18 October 1933 at which Aldous Huxley inveighed against the degradation of contemporary thought. The famous British novelist, who had recently published* Brave New World *(1932), passionately yet humorously defended the intellectual values threatened by the extension of mass culture. He spoke in French, the language in which, as he said, "the mind and rational goodwill of the age of Voltaire found expression and travelled from one end of Europe to the other."



Aldous Huxley (1894-1963).

WE are here to discuss the current state of the European mind and how to preserve what has been achieved by it. A look at contemporary intellectual life (I am speaking of the life of the masses, not of the elites) brings out two extremely important facts: firstly, that intelligence and its instrument, logic, are generally denigrated; and secondly, that what I may call the contemporary lifestyle is remarkably vulgar and crude. Improving the lifestyle is desirable in itself. We appreciate intuitively that beauty is superior to ugliness. The reaffirmation of intellectual values is desirable in itself, but also and especially because it is only in the name of intellectual values—such as truth and justice—that the countries of Europe can reach agreement. People only make sacrifices—and as Mr. Benda so rightly said yesterday, sacrifices must be made—for things they believe in and to which they attribute supreme value.

Anti-intellectualism is already an old movement, and it shows itself in various forms—Bergsonism, Freudianism and Watson's behaviourism. There is no point in summarizing these doctrines, since everyone here is quite familiar with them. What interests us is to find out why anti-intellectualism has enjoyed and still enjoys such great popularity, and secondly how it can be combated. The reasons for its popularity are, unfortunately, all too obvious. It flatters men's passions, particularly laziness: it is so difficult to reason, so easy to trust to instinct and intuition. If it were a matter of laziness the harm would not be very serious. But anti-intellectualism also flatters more dangerous passions. It is admirably well adapted to justifying the complex of hatreds and vanities that is the very essence of nationalism. National-Socialist philosophy, for example, continually speaks of "particular truths" as opposed to the mundane objective truths of intellectuals. Then there are Nordic instincts, the infallible intuitions of blond men.

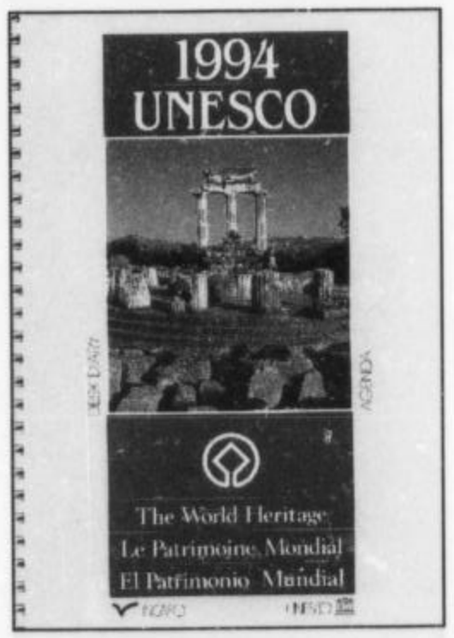
How can we combat anti-intellectualism? How can we reinforce that faith in reason without which the political unity of Europe cannot be achieved? First of all there is logic. All anti-intellectual doctrines are self-destructive. For example, you may say with Freud that all intellectual constructions are merely rationalizations of conscious or unconscious desires. Very well. But your own anti-intellectualist doctrine is one of these intellectual constructions. You find yourself on the horns of a dilemma: either your doctrine is true, in which case it represents no more than the expression of a repressed, probably sexual, desire, and has no objective meaning, or it has an objective meaning, in which case it is false.

Unfortunately logic has very little influence with the masses. The masses need to be spoken to in terms of absolute authority, as Jehovah spoke to the Israelites, or in parables, that is in terms of art. Children and the feeble-minded—and unfortunately there are many of those—are the only people who can be spoken to with authority, and that authority must first be possessed. The various national educational systems are not under our control, and we are not demagogues or rabble-rousers. So the only way we can influence people's minds is by persuasion—that is, by art. Logic destroys anti-intellectualism. But the masses only accept this logic when it is embodied in a work of art. Unfortunately works of art cannot be produced to order, as Napoleon and the Bolsheviks painfully discovered. All we can do is hope. An intellectual artist may appear—and then again he may not. It is not within our power to create him. We can organize everything, except art.

BAD LITERATURE IN INDUSTRIAL QUANTITIES

I now come to the second observation we have made in examining the modern world. Our times are anti-intellectualist;

Organize your year with beauty!



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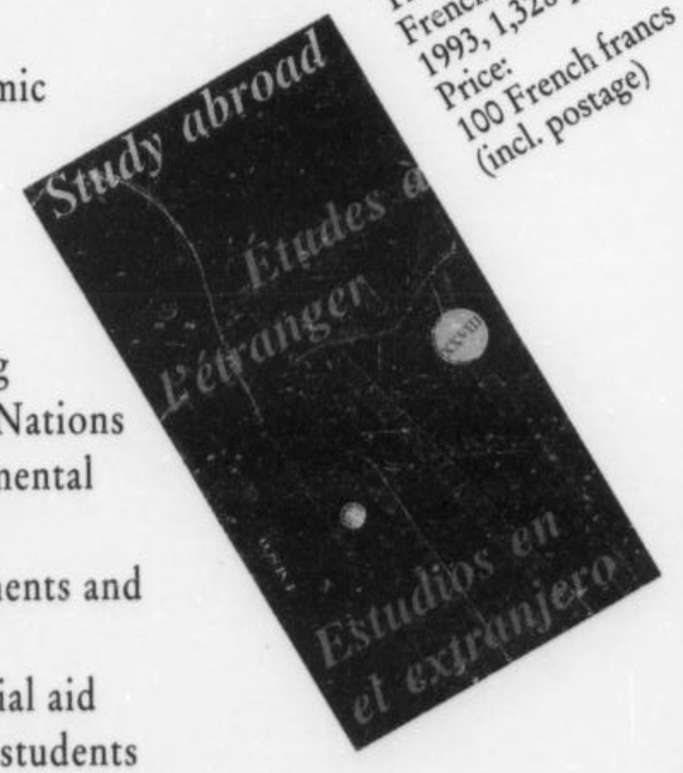

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I V E S

Text selected and presented by Edgardo Canton

they are also vulgar. The contemporary lifestyle is frankly disgusting. We live on a diet of Ponson du Terrail and Paul de Kock. The quite specific vulgarity of our era shows itself in the quite specific vulgarity of our popular art, which is also the cause of it. As nearly always happens, the movement is circular and vicious. What are the causes of this vulgarity? They are partly economic and demographic, partly intellectual and aesthetic. Industrial development and the development of virgin territory in the New World have led to a sudden expansion of Europe's population, which has more than doubled in one century. Next comes primary education for all. An enormous potential readership has been created, for whom entrepreneurs have set up a new industry—the reading matter industry. Now this reading matter could only be and will only be of very poor quality. Why? It is a matter of arithmetic. The number of writers with artistic talent is always very limited. So it follows that at any time the bulk of contemporary literature has always been bad. Now the amount of literature produced annually has grown faster than the population. There are twice as many of us today as there were at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the number of printed words we consume each year is at least fifty—if not a hundred—times greater than the number consumed by our great-grandparents. Hence it follows that the percentage of bad literature in the total must be higher than ever. Europeans have got into the habit of reading all the time. It is a vice, like smoking cigarettes—or rather, perhaps, like smoking opium or taking to cocaine; for this literature, which is almost all bad, is a mental substitute for narcotic and hallucinatory drugs. Europe is being fed—stuffed, one might say—with tenth-rate literature.

This is completely new. In the past, people were only familiar directly or indirectly with a few books, but they were of very high quality. English people, for instance, until quite recently grew up with the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, both of unmatched purity and nobility of style. Nowadays, they grow up with the *Daily Express*, magazines and detective stories. Universal education has had the lamentable result that instead of occasionally reading masterpieces people continually read rubbish.

There is another very alarming phenomenon: language itself is being corrupted by advertisers. The disease is not as far advanced in France as in America and England, where advertising has already tainted a great many of the noblest words. For example, the word "service" crops up again and again in English-language advertising. People talk about the manufacture of pills and canned foods as they once used to talk about the work of Saint Francis of Assisi. A man sells you a can of beans with a 20 per cent net profit. Fine. But it is unacceptable that he should talk to you with clerical unction about the "service"—in the Christian sense of the word—he has done you. The same thing has happened to many other words. Beauty, Grace, Adventure, Virile, Romantic—a whole vocabulary of splendid words has been used in advertising and thus made suspect. It is reaching the point where people cannot hear these words without immediately reacting with cynicism. It is very difficult to separate words from the things they signify; and when words are tainted as they are every day, the values are tainted also. Every language is a vehicle for the best traditions of the race: if you ruin this vehicle, as advertisers are doing, you destroy these traditions.

THE CATERWAULING OF POPULAR MUSIC

What has happened in the realm of literature has happened also in that of popular music. But here the invention of talking machines rather than primary education has created a big audience of listeners. (It is, by the way, the invention of the rotary press that has led to the current growth of the literature industry.) Listening matter is needed for this huge audience: it is manufactured, and inevitably it is of very poor quality. But in the case of popular music things are complicated by aesthetic matters. For the last 130 years musicians have greatly developed the technical means used to express their feelings. Beethoven created a whole repertoire of technical means to express the passions—means unknown to even his most brilliant predecessors. The enrichment of musical technique progressed throughout the nineteenth century. Berlioz, Wagner, Verdi, the Russians, Debussy—all contributed new means of expression to the common stock. Naturally the feelings these composers aimed to express did not always have the purity and nobility that characterize Beethoven's. Wagner, especially, gave music the power to express—and with great power of artistic persuasion—things that are fundamentally despicable. Popular composers have learned their craft from the great artists. Thanks to Beethoven, Berlioz, Wagner, Rimski-Korsakov and Debussy, they are now in a position to express with gripping power the basest emotions—the most abject sentimentality, the most animal sexuality and the most frenetic collective joy. . . .

The disease is not completely curable, but I believe it can be mitigated, firstly through education. We pay too little attention to the development of taste and a critical faculty; or if we try to develop them, we always choose remote, outdated examples. If I had to teach young people the art of telling beauty from ugliness, the real from the imitation, I would try to choose my examples from the contemporary world. I would focus their critical faculties on politicians' speeches and on advertising. I would get them to hear the differences in quality between a piece of jazz and one of Beethoven's late quartets. I would get them to read some detective story, and then *Crime and Punishment* or *The Possessed*.

So much for what can be organized. But there are also forces that cannot be organized, and this brings us back again to art. If fine art remains pure, all is not lost. There will always be an elite to respond to the appeal of this art, to let itself be shaped by it, to experience its style. Artists have an enormous responsibility. It is for them, especially now that organized religions have lost their power, to undertake the task of restating, revivifying and preserving spiritual values. If they compromise with the world, in the Christian sense of the word, they lose not only their artistic souls but also the souls of a whole potential elite. ■

International Volunteer Day

by Bill Jackson

EACH year since it was established on the initiative of the United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) in 1985, International Volunteer Day has been celebrated in at least ninety countries to honour the millions of volunteers all over the world who give their time to help their fellow human beings.

At a point when the trend in many countries is to cut back on social services they once provided, international, national and local volunteer organizations in both the North and the South are playing a vital role.

In one developed country—Australia—the New South Wales Volunteer Centre describes volunteers as "the people who deliver meals, serve at school canteens, raise funds to buy community equipment, run clubs, watch neighbourhoods, fight bush fires, operate drop-in centres and carry out a host of other services which the community demands but could often not afford without the free help they provide."

In developing countries it is sometimes asked whether there is any real need for international volunteers and whether volunteering may not be an outdated import from colonial times. Sadly, one has only to witness the degree of need and suffering in countries such as Angola, Somalia and Bosnia to realize how much there is for such volunteers to do.

Some 120 countries on the long haul to development are happy to welcome specialists from the UN Volunteers Programme and other international bodies that work side by side with local organizations. "It is a matter of pride," said the governor of the Punjab (Pakistan) on International Volunteer Day 1992, "that nearly 3,500 voluntary social welfare agencies, comprising hundreds of

Top, a UN Volunteer (at left of photo) supervises the unloading of sacks of grain in Afghanistan. Above, two Volunteers, one British and one Dutch, explain the electoral process to Cambodian villagers through an interpreter before the elections of May 1993. With the help of almost 50,000 specially trained Cambodians, 465 Volunteers from 45 countries carried out a programme of civic education, registered 4.7 million voters and supervised the polling stations.

Above, a Volunteer from Myanmar (centre) with her opposite number during a vaccination drive in the Comoro Islands. Below, in Bhutan a Ugandan Volunteer shows students how an anemometer works.

thousands of dedicated and selfless workers all over the Punjab, are engaged in voluntary social service and as such supplementing government's efforts in every conceivable field."

The past two years have brought major changes for international organizations that, like UNV, send volunteers all over the world. The sheer scale and frequency of famines and refugee crises have required programmes that had been almost exclusively devoted to long-term development to set up specialist humanitarian relief units.

The current trend is towards having volunteers who serve in developing countries concentrate on helping local communities to manage their resources to the best effect. Thus we can expect to see more and more emphasis on volunteers from outside working on a peer basis with local people in such fields as adult literacy, youth initiatives and population and family life education as well as the protection of human rights and work on the cultural aspects of development such as the restoration of archaeological sites of national importance.

UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor and United Nations Volunteers Programme Executive Co-ordinator Brenda Gael McSweeney have launched a joint appeal calling for the development of international volunteering. Noting that "Volunteers are urgently needed change-agents and peace-builders," they call on "governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and decision-makers everywhere to take advantage of International Volunteer Day to introduce practical measures to promote and facilitate voluntary service. There was never greater need, nor opportunity, to mobilize volunteers for international programmes of all kinds. Volunteers are an unparalleled source of energy, action and hope. Their efforts must be encouraged in every way possible, so that they make the world a better place and inspire the next generation by their example." ■

BILL JACKSON,
of Ireland, is chief of the external relations division of the United Nations Volunteers.

The painted caves of Mogao

by José Serra-Vega

UNESCO IN ACTION
HERITAGE

WITH its paths shaded by slender poplars and its cool, swift-flowing streams, the oasis of Dunhuang is an island of greenery in an otherwise arid landscape on the edge of the Gobi and Takla Makan deserts in China's Gansu province. Some twenty-five kilometres to the southeast are the famous Mogao caves—492 temples and sanctuaries hewn into a 1,600-metre-long stretch of a sheer cliff overlooking the Dachuan river. They are a unique record of a period when Buddhist culture in China was at its height, and the Tang dynasty, which reigned from 618 to 907, was at the apogee of its power. In 1987 they were placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The area's history is closely associated with the first Chinese raids against the nomads of central Asia at a time when the struggle to control trade routes and the Hexi corridor sparked endless clashes between the emperors of China and nomadic tribes of Huns, Mongols and Turks.

A long section of the Great Wall defended the empire's northern border. Around 117 B.C. this line of fortifications housed two garrisons, one of which, based at Dunhuang, was for several centuries the last bastion of Chinese civilization at the empire's westernmost frontier. Beyond stretched an immense salt desert so hot that camels were provided with patches of leather to protect their knees from being scorched by the sand when they knelt down.

A CULTURAL CROSSROADS

The two busiest roads plied by merchants travelling from the West to China followed the lines of oases that stretched to the north and south of central Asia. One followed the course of the Tarim river on the edge of the Takla Makan desert; the other ran through the oases fed by melting ice from the Kunlun mountain range. Both converged on Dunhuang.

Dunhuang is strategically situated at an intersection of the Silk Roads which from the time of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) brought China into contact with the Indo-Iranian civilizations and Mediterranean Europe. For more than a thousand years it was a busy frontier post and trading settlement where caravans came and went. It was also an active Buddhist centre.

At Dunhuang travellers wearied by the harsh climate and attacks by desert looters found a garrison to protect them, comfortable taverns and hospitable young women. They could deposit or borrow money and hire camels for the 1,700-kilometre trip to the capital of the empire. There were warehouses where they could store their merchandise and many craftsmen were ready to serve them. Payment could be made in gold, currency, textiles or grain. Debtors were penalized with high interest rates and, in serious cases, confiscation of their property.

A RELIGIOUS MICROCOSM

Cut off from the rest of the empire for long periods of time, Dunhuang was a cosmopolitan enclave thronged with wayfarers of diverse origins and callings. The intensity of its economic life was matched by the religious activities of the monks and missionaries who gathered there—Buddhists, Manichaeans, Nestorians and Muslims.

Buddhism originated in India during the fifth century B.C. and reached China during the Han dynasty. But Buddhist culture, thought and art only began to spread extensively throughout central Asia when it was encouraged by the rulers of the Kushan empire during the first four centuries of the Christian era. The Mogao caves are just one link—albeit the most famous—in a long chain of Buddhist cave-

Below left, the entry to the Mogao caves. Below right, inside Cave 296 (Northern Chou dynasty), whose decoration is inspired by the *Jataka*, narrations of former incarnations of the Buddha.

temples stretching from Afghanistan to the heart of China.

According to an inscription deciphered at Dunhuang, the first cave may have been hewn on the orders of a monk named Luzun in 361 A.D.—almost a century before Buddhism was recognized as China's official religion in 444 A.D. This was the first step in the construction of the huge cave-temple complex, a task that took nearly a thousand years (from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries).

Throughout this period, missionary monks who journeyed along the Silk Roads from India to convert China to Buddhism would meet Chinese monks and pilgrims travelling in the opposite direction, seeking the roots of their religion in India. To avoid the Himalayas the pilgrims had to make a long and dangerous detour through a vast expanse of unsafe or hostile territory. They trekked westward across the deserts and high plateaux of Tian Shan, the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush before reaching the Ganges valley. After purifying themselves in the river's sacred waters at Benares and visiting the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, the travellers would study Sanskrit and learn about the mysteries of Buddhist thought before setting out on their return journey laden with relics and holy books.

A TREASURE TROVE OF BUDDHIST ART

The Mogao caves bear witness to a number of important episodes in the history of central Asia. The Tang dynasty's powerful grip on the Silk Roads during the seventh century is reflected in colossal statues of the Buddha and in frescoes illustrating transcendental doctrines. Tantric themes began to appear when the site was occupied by Tibetans between 790 and 851, increasing in number after the conquest of Gansu by the Tangut and the proliferation of lamaistic sects under the Western Hsia dynasty, which ruled from 1036 to 1227.

This ensemble of statues and paintings deeply rooted in the events of Chinese history is also a treasure trove of a thousand years of Buddhist art. Each temple is entered through a chapel leading to a wide corridor. The lofty roofs are conical. Magnificent frescoes depict the birth, life and death of the Buddha and his successive incarnations; impressive processions of bodhisattvas and other Buddhist saints; dancing angels and magicians; disciples and believers; palaces and monasteries in the midst of awe-inspiring landscapes; dragons, elephants, wild beasts and bouquets and garlands of flowers.

The caves are covered by some 45,000 square metres of splendid frescoes and house over 2,400 painted statues of outstanding refinement and beauty.

A portrait of King Uygur, the principal donor of Cave 409 (Western Hsia dynasty), shows him holding a perfume-burner as he steps forward to pay tribute to Buddha.

The paintings and sculptures display an elegant blend of Hindu, Persian, Indo-Hellenic and Greco-Roman influences combined with characteristic features of Chinese art, which are prevalent in the treatment of architecture, landscape, clothing, facial expressions and women's hair styles.

The thousand or so caves must have been a spectacular site at the height of their splendour during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Some were perhaps the work of private individuals, but most of them must have been financed by powerful political clans whose exploits are commemorated by carved stelae. Others were made by Buddhist communities dedicated to the worship of the household god and other divinities, to providing aid after natural disasters, and to the organization of spring banquets, funerals and cultural activities of various kinds.

Invasions, the turbulent history of medieval China and natural wear-and-tear have taken their toll of the temples. Looting and profanation were only halted in recent times. The effigies of the Buddha were coated with soot and smoke when troops of the White Russian army retreating from Siberia spent the winter of 1920 in the caves. Considering the vandalism they have suffered, it is a miracle that nearly half of them have survived.

Since 1949, the Dunhuang Cultural Relics Research Institute has been engaged in on-site conservation, research and analysis, and the only invaders have been tourists.

In the late nineteenth century the disasters and strife that engulfed China brought a flood of refugees to Dunhuang. In 1900 a Taoist monk named Wang Yuan Lu (Wang Gulu) attempted to restore one of the Mogao temples with his own slender resources, discovering in the process a walled-up hiding place where monks had hidden some 30,000 manuscripts and relics when the site was invaded by the Xias in 1036.

The British explorer Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1943) heard of the discovery while on an expedition to the Takla Makan oases and in 1907 he visited Dunhuang and studied the documents with mounting excitement. The earliest text was a treatise on Buddhist canon law translated by Xuan Zhang, the most famous of the Buddhist pilgrims who visited India during the seventh century. With it were fifth-century scrolls written in Brahmi script, Tibetan religious texts, paintings on silk and religious banners. To general indifference, 3,000 scrolls and 6,000 manuscripts, objects and paintings made their way to the British Museum in London.

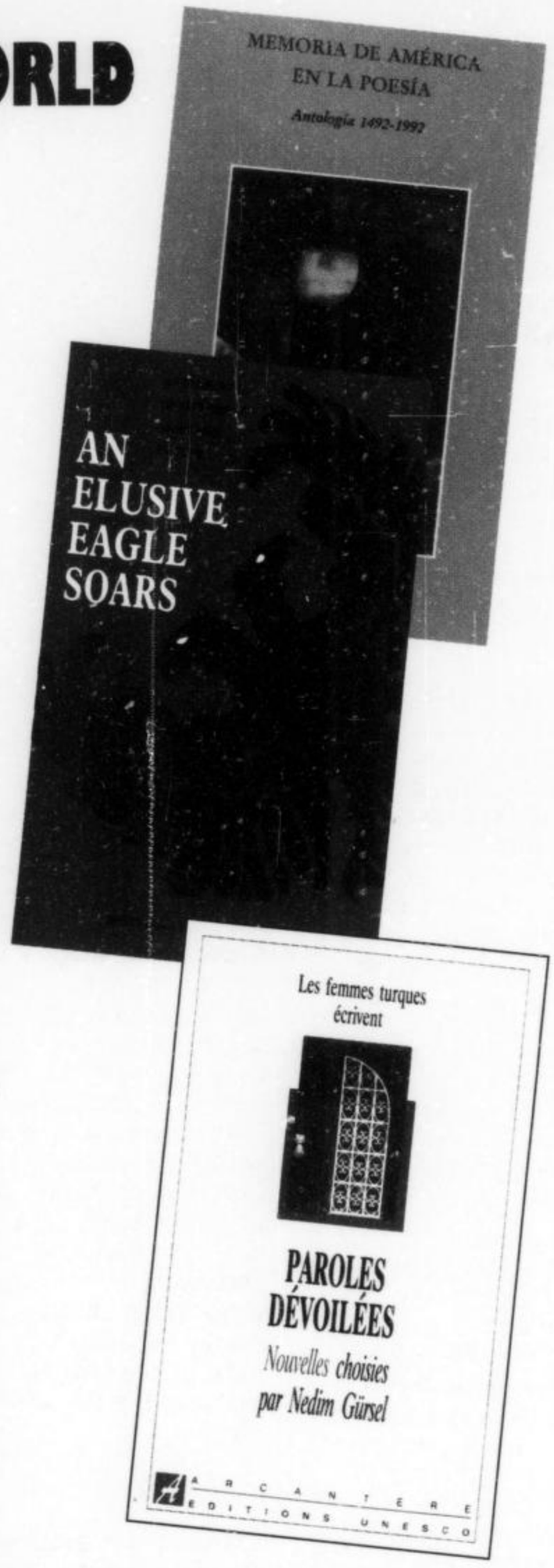
Aurel Stein was the first of a long line of visitors to the caves. The French sinologist Paul Pelliot examined some 20,000 old documents by candlelight at the incredible rate of a thousand per day until overwhelmed by fatigue and by dust from the ancient manuscripts. He discovered Tibetan manuscripts preserved between two boards knotted together, Buddhist poems, folktales, accounting ledgers and other texts in Chinese, Sogdian, Uighur, Khotanese, Kushan, Sanskrit, Hebrew and Syriac. Some 4,000 of these documents were removed to the Guimet Museum in Paris.

When they heard of the interest foreigners were showing in the Chinese heritage, the authorities in Beijing ordered 10,000 documents to be brought to the capital, but they were transported in such unsatisfactory conditions that many of them were lost en route. Others reappeared in Berlin, Saint Petersburg and Kyoto. Shortly afterwards, the market was flooded with copies produced in Tianjin.

This extraordinary collection, now dispersed, is vital evidence of the history of Asia and especially of the spread of Buddhism in China under the Tang dynasty. The documents and the cave-temples where they were found are also the most spectacular illustration of the cultural and artistic exchanges that took place along the Silk Roads. ■

JOSÉ SERRA-VEGA,
a Peruvian engineer and former staff member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has worked in the Indian sub-continent on technologies geared to environmental conservation.

BOOKS OF THE WORLD
by Calum Wise



PAROLES DÉVOILÉES.

An anthology of contemporary Turkish short stories by women writers.
Edited by Nedim Gürsel.
278 pp. Arcantère/UNESCO Publishing.
UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. (In French).

'Women's writing is a specific form of writing," claims Nedim Gürsel in her foreword to this anthology—although no-one, in Turkish or any other language, has ever been able to define exactly what it is. One is on much firmer ground if one asserts that there is a specific Turkish women's literature (that is, one written by women). This book is a proof of it. The authors of the stories in *Paroles dévoilées* ("Unveiled Words") are outside the currents of militant feminism and a modern, theoretical approach to literature. Rather, their work provides an intimate, introspective glimpse of family life. They remain rooted in Turkish soil (like Yasar Kemal's Mehmed) and in contemporary Turkish life, yet their world has affinities with those of Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

There have been Turkish women writers who were militant socialists and republican activists, but the sixteen authors selected here by Nedim Gürsel are not among them. All but one were born between 1925 and 1957, making them the heirs and beneficiaries of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Republic, which was founded in 1923. As if to give this first generation of women writers a certain amount of symbolic significance, the collection opens with a short story by Halide Edip Adivar, an early twentieth-century "ideological" novelist. The harsh yet sensitive tone of these short stories, often narrated in the first person, introduces the reader to an objective fictional world where the events of everyday life upstage political and national ones.

MEMORIA DE AMÉRICA EN LA POESIA. ANTOLOGIA 1492-1992.

Poems selected by Fernando Ainsa and Edgar Montiel.
313 pp. UNESCO Publishing.
UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. (In Spanish).

Last year, UNESCO organized a series of events to mark the "Fifth Centenary of the Encounter between Two Worlds", commemorating the European discovery of America. The *UNESCO Courier* devoted its May issue, entitled "Rediscovering 1492", to the subject. The articles described various aspects of the encounter as well as its intellectual, cultural and artistic repercussions, which have radically changed our view of the world. One of the authors concluded by suggesting that we should "begin preparing now for the fifth centenary of . . . 1992."

Two other contributors to that issue of the *Courier*, Fernando Ainsa and Edgar Montiel, were probably thinking of both present and future generations when they put together this anthology of Spanish- and Portuguese-language verse by ninety-seven poets spanning nearly five centuries. The volume contains works by internationally-known figures who have been translated into many languages, such as Asturias, Borges, García Lorca, Lope de Vega, Camões, Neruda and Paz, as well as poems by writers whose reputation is mainly confined to their own countries. A number of anonymous Guaraní, Quechua and Nahuatl works are also included. Clearly there is a logic in this selection. It seeks to engage readers' emotions as well as their intellects by presenting a broad spectrum of talents and sensibilities focused on a central theme: America, the source of one of the great myths of the modern Western world—that of the land of plenty.*

AN ELUSIVE EAGLE SOARS

An anthology of modern Albanian poetry.
Texts selected, translated and presented by Robert Elsie.
213 pp. Forest Books/UNESCO. UNESCO Collection of Representative Works.

Albanian is currently spoken by some six million people in the Balkans. The language is actually divided into two dialects, with Gheg in use to the north and Tosk to the south of the Shkumbin River, along whose course ran the Roman Via Egnatia, an extension of the Appian Way. The literary language, which has become standard throughout Albania as well as in Kosovo and Macedonia, is a mixture of both dialects, although approximately 80 per cent of it is based on Tosk. The earliest vernacular texts date back to the Counter-Reformation, and the oldest known Albanian poem was written in 1592. Modern Albanian poetry came into existence during the 1930s, when Lasgush Poradeci and Migjeni broke with the tradition of romantic nationalism that had dominated the genre until then. As Robert Elsie points out in his introduction, "the twentieth century arrived late in Albania."

The break with socialist realism was another turning point. The new departure sparked a lively literary debate pitting traditionalist and innovative currents—the latter led by Ismail Kadare—against each other. This anthology recounts the difficult birth and stormy history of modern Albanian poetry with a representative selection of verse written by poets within and outside the country. It includes a helpful introduction as well as an extensive bibliography of works published in five languages. Mimoza Ahmeti (born 1963), is the youngest poet whose work appears in the collection. She wrote, "It would be awful/ Waking up the same every morning/But it would be even worse/Seeing the end of the day/With morning eyes". ■

* See *The Discovery of Guiana*, by Sir Walter Raleigh, who was a buccaneer in the service of Queen Elizabeth I of England, as well as an explorer. His account was largely responsible for the spread and success of this myth in Europe. This year, UNESCO and Editions Retz (Paris) are publishing the first unabridged French translation of Raleigh's work under the title *El Dorado*.

RECENT RECORDS
by Isabelle Leymarie

JAZZ

MICHEL CAMILO
Rendez-vous
Michel Camilo (piano), Anthony Jackson (electric double bass), Dave Weckl (drums).
Columbia CD 473772 2

The Dominican pianist, here accompanied by veteran studio musicians Anthony Jackson and Dave Weckl, is as expressive, impulsive and irrepressible as ever. This wonderful recording features a funky, highly inventive interpretation of "Caravan", the dreamy ballad "Remembrance", and various numbers charged with the prodigious energy that is Camilo's hallmark.

GABRIELLE GOODMAN
Travelin' Light
Gabrielle Goodman (vocals), Don Alias (conga, percussion), David Bunn and Barry Miles (piano, synthesizer), Tony Bunn, Anthony Cox and Ruben Rodriguez (bass), Mike Cain (piano), Kevin Eubanks and Wolfgang Muthspiel (guitar), Mark Feldman (violin), Gary Thomas (soprano and tenor sax), Buddy Williams (drums).
JMT CD 514 006-2.

At a time when the great jazz divas—Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald—are either dead or retired, it's encouraging to see that a new generation of singers is getting ready to take over. Gabrielle Goodman is one of them. *Travelin' Light* is her first recording. Goodman, who started out singing gospel and classical music, is astonishingly smooth and natural. Her ascents to the upper end of the scale bring to mind the 1970s pop singer Minnie Ripperton. This is a splendid piece of work, with inventive backing from musicians Mike Cain and Anthony Cox, who often perform together, and Kevin Eubanks and Gary Thomas, who are well known for their love of experimentation and their refusal to make concessions to commercialism.

MUSIC FROM AROUND THE WORLD

AZERBAIJAN
Azerbaijani Mugam
Bahram Mansuro (*tar*)
Anthology of Traditional Musics
UNESCO/Auvidis CD D 8045.

Virtuoso Bahram Mansurov performs this beautiful music, which is based on a number of contemplative *mugams* (a mode similar to the *maqam* and the *raga*), on a metallic-sounding lute known as the *tar*. Once a Persian satrapy and ruled by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, Azerbaijan has produced many artists and musicians, but the folk traditions of this land in the southeastern Caucasus are little known. This fine recording, which forms part of the excellent series produced by UNESCO to preserve the world's musical heritage, fills some gaps in our knowledge.

BAHRAIN
Fidjeri: Songs of the Pearl Divers
Musics and Musicians of the World collection
UNESCO/Auvidis CD D 8046.

The origins of these old songs sung by the pearl divers of Bahrain to accompany work on board ship can be traced back to mythology. Accompanied by clapping, drumming, small cymbals and empty water jars, the songs evoke the harshness of life at sea and exalt the greatness of Allah. They express the sense of community of the pearl divers, whose way of life and cultural traditions are dying out as a result of competition from cultivated pearls and the impact of technological progress.

White Country Blues. 1926-1938
A Lighter Shade of Blue
Set of 2 CDs. Roots n' Blues 4728862.

This anthology presents a

number of white singers from the southern United States who flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. The performers are unknown to the general public even in their own country, yet they laid the foundations for the work of an entire generation of folk and hootenanny singers, including Arlo Guthrie and Bob Dylan. It is often hard to tell the difference between them and the black bluesmen by whom they were strongly influenced. With their nasal voices and rustic instruments, they also form part of the hillbilly tradition. Some comic pieces, such as "Adam and Eve", performed by Mr. and Mrs. Chris Bouchillon, came out of vaudeville, which declined with the growth of the record and movie industries during the 1920s.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

MAURICE RAVEL
Daphnis et Chloé
London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus conducted by Kent Nagano.
Erato CD 4509-91712-2.

The Russian critic and impresario Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Ravel to compose this splendid three-part "choreographic symphony", which is one of his major works. The scenario is by Michel Fokine, then the choreographer of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The lush timbres and tonal colours create a magical, dreamlike atmosphere and an extraordinary sensuality. "My aim in writing it," said Ravel, "was to compose a vast musical fresco less concerned with archaism than with fidelity to the Greece of my dreams, a Greece, moreover, that is fairly close to that imagined and painted by late eighteenth-century French artists". This is an outstanding version by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, sensitively conducted by Kent Nagano.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
Piano Sonatas D 664 & D 959
Elisabeth Leonskaja
Teldec CD 9031-74865-2.

Russian pianist Elisabeth Leonskaja follows up her recent, highly acclaimed recordings of Brahms and Liszt with this brilliant performance of two Schubert sonatas that were composed in 1819 and 1828 as the second part of a trilogy that became famous. These charming works, in which Schubert has freed himself from Beethoven's influence and already anticipates Bruckner, cast a spell whose effects linger in the memory.

J.F. REBEL
Les Elémens.
Les Caractères de la Danse.
Le tombeau de M. de Lully
Les Musiciens du Louvre. Marc Minkowski
Musifrance CD 2292-45974-2.

This recording is an opportunity to enjoy the little-known work of Jean-Féry Rebel, a pupil of Lully. Rebel is best remembered for his courtly music and dances, but his works are more profound than their titles suggest. *Les Elémens* opens with with a bold, gripping, almost Wagnerian "Cahos" which, wrote the *Mercure de France* in 1738, "in the estimation of the greatest Connoisseurs is one of the most beautiful symphonic works that exist in this genre". Rebel himself said, "I have dared to link the idea of the confusion of the Elements with that of confusion in harmony". His undertaking is totally successful. The lightness of the delightful "Rossignols" and the two "Tambourins" from the same suite is in marked contrast with the introductory "Cahos". The second part of the recording, *Les Caractères de la Danse,* consists of a series of dances entitled "Bourrée", "Chaconne", "Sarabande", and "Rigaudon". They are less unusual than *Les Elémens,* but just as captivating. ■

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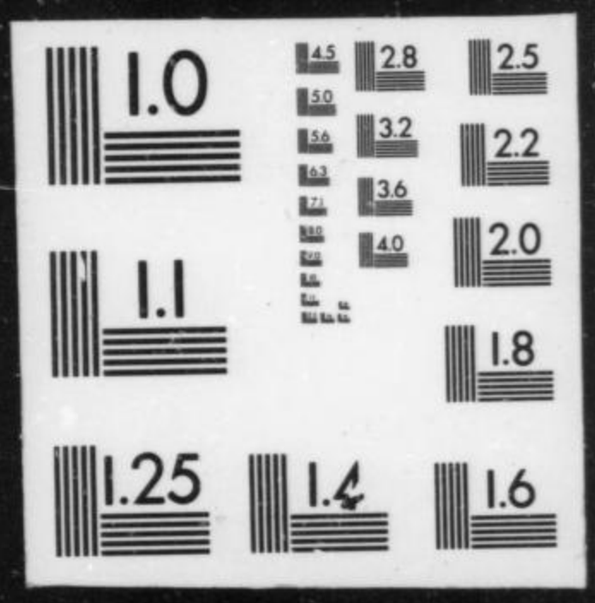
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